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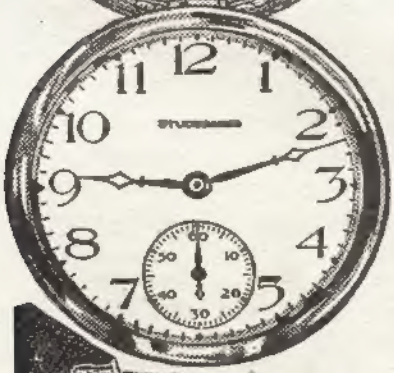

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Weird Tales

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Contents for March, 1928

Cover Design ..... **C. C. Senf**
Illustrating a scene in "The Strange People"

The Strange People (Part 1) ..... **Murray Leinster** **293**
They guarded their secret with their lives, and chose death in preference to revealing the ghastly mystery—a three-part serial

The Eighth Green Man ..... **G. G. Pendarves** **311**
An uncanny horror befell the guests of the innkeeper when the Green Men held their revels

Night Trees ..... **Frank Belknap Long, Jr.** **321**
Verse

The Tenant ..... **August W. Derleth** **322**
Strange disappearances of children, and the final vanishing of the scientist himself, gave an unhealthy name to the house

Flames of Destiny ..... **Arlton Eadie** **327**
Back through the mists of time, to the days of Cromwell, rolled the years, and brought romance and high adventure

[CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE]

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[CONTINUED FROM PRECEDING PAGE]

Folks Used to Believe:
The Vampire ..... **Alvin F. Harlow** **336**
One of the weird concepts held by our ancestors

The Twin Soul ..... **Amelia Reynolds Long** **337**
A strange story of the creation of a living being as a scientific experiment—a soulless being, that became a man

The Poet ..... **A. Leslie** **356**
Verse

Ebony Magic ..... **Stella Wynne** **357**
Rath's hands longed to commit murder, but Rath's will fought against the horror that his hands strove to accomplish

The Curse of a Song ..... **Eli Colter** **367**
A powerful story—a ghost-tale about a malignant hatred that came back from the grave to blight the lives of two lovers

Epigraphe Pour un Livre Condamné ..... **Charles Baudelaire** **385**
Verse, translated for Weird Tales by Clark Ashton Smith

The Black Angel ..... **C. Ed Rowley** **386**
A short tale of devil-worship—the Count Brabationo lifted his voice in praise and prayer to Satan, with dire results

The Tree-Man Ghost ..... **Percy B. Prior** **390**
A dramatic ghost-legend of Scotland—the aftermath of a cold-blooded murder for the treasures of an abbey

The Giant World (Conclusion) ..... **Ray Cummings** **393**
A three-part weird-scientific serial—a distant world—giants growing into largeness unfathomable—eery adventures

The Hyena ..... **Robert E. Howard** **405**
Senecoza, the African fetish-man, chose a weird way to accomplish his evil purposes

Weird Story Reprint:
The Legend of the Moor's Legacy ..... **Washington Irving** **413**
Peregil found a mighty treasure in the ruins of the Alhambra, but was plagued by barbers, alguazils and alcaldes

The Eyrie **425**
A chat with the readers

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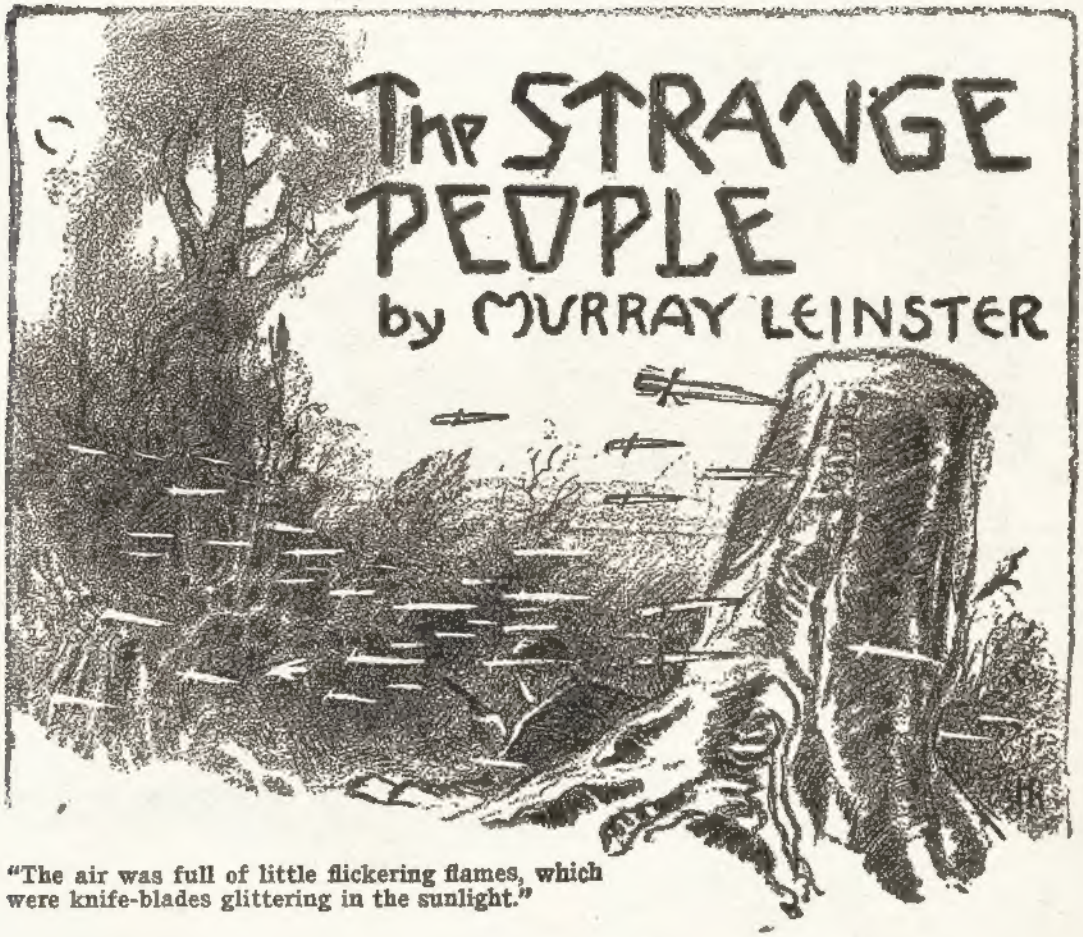


"The air was full of little flickering flames, which were knife-blades glittering in the sunlight."

ACCORDING to Cunningham's schedule there was a perfectly feasible route to romance and to high adventure. It began wherever you happened to be and led to Boston. There you took a train to Hatton Junction and changed to an accomodation train of one passenger coach and one baggage car. That led you to Bendale, New Hampshire, and there you hired a team. Both romance and adventure were to be found somewhere around Coulters, which was eight miles from Bendale. Cunningham was sure nobody else knew this secret because he had found it in a highly unlikely place and almost anybody else who happened to look there would find only dry statistics and descriptions.

However, as he boarded the accomodation train he inspected his fellow passengers carefully. One upon a quest like Cunningham's likes to feel that his secret is his alone.

At first glance the passenger coach was reassuring. There were a dozen or more passengers, but with two exceptions they were plainly people of the countryside. New England farmers. Two women who had been shopping at the Junction and were comparing their bargains. A swarthy French-Canadian mill-hand with his dark-eyed sweetheart. Odds and ends of humanity; the "characters" one finds in any New England village.

But even the two men Cunningham recognized as outsiders like himself were wholly unlikely to be upon the same quest. One had the solid,

pleasant expression of a safe-and-sane man of business on his vacation, perhaps in search of a good fishing-stream. The other was a foreigner, immaculately dressed and with waxed mustaches, who was reading something that Cunningham could not see and exhibiting all the signs of mounting rage. Cunningham might have become curious about the foreigner at another time. He might have tried to guess at his race and wonder what reading-matter could fill any man with such evident fury.

But being upon the last stages of the route to romance, Cunningham thought of nothing else. As to whether the girl would be as attractive as her picture, he had no idea. Whether or not she had been married since it was taken, he could not tell. What reception he would receive at the end of his journey was highly problematical. He might be regarded as insane. He might—and he hugged the knowledge to him tightly—he might run a very excellent chance of being killed.

This was folly, of course, but Cunningham had an ample excuse. For ten years he had toiled at a desk. He had worn a green celluloid eyeshade and added up figures in a tall ledger, or made notes in a day-book, or duly pounded out, "Yours of the fifteenth instant received and in reply would state . . ." at the dictation of his employer. For eight hours out of the twenty-four, for eleven and a half months out of the twelve, he made memos or orders and payments and violations imposed and repairs made, and all connected with the business of a firm which installed and repaired elevators.

And now he was free. An uncle, dimly remembered, had died without any heirs but Cunningham. Cunningham had inherited fifty thousand dollars and within ten minutes after receiving the news had resigned his job and punched his employer's rather bulbous nose.

Now he was in quest of adventure and romance. He considered that he had earned them both. Ten years of law-abiding citizenship in New York entitled him to all of adventure he could gather, and ten years in a boarding-house earned him at least one authentic romance.

Cunningham had in his pocket the picture of a girl who lived a mile and a half from Coulters, New Hampshire. The picture had been taken four months before and her name was Maria. She was a pretty girl and had smiled at the camera without self-consciousness. That was all that Cunningham knew about her, but he had built up dreams to supply the rest. And he was quite insanely confident that where she was, there would be romance.

But romance alone would not do. There must be adventure as well. And adventure was duly promised. The picture was in the *Geographic Magazine* which travel- and adventure-hungry folk devour. It was one of the illustrations of an article prosaically entitled *Ethnological Studies in New Hampshire,* which very soberly outlined the radical traits of New Englanders and the immigrants who are supplanting them. And Maria was a Stranger—one of a group of people who were a mystery and an enigma to all those around them.

They were two hundred people of unknown origin who spoke English far purer than the New Hampshireites around them and avoided contact with their neighbors with a passionate sincerity. They could not be classified even by the expert on races of men who had written the article. They were not Americans or Anglo-Saxons. They were not any known people. But whatever they were, they were splendid specimens, and they were hated by their neigh-

bors, and they kept strictly away from all contact with all other folk. The New Englanders charitably retailed rumors that more than one inquisitive visitor among them had mysteriously disappeared. Strangest of all, they had appeared from nowhere just two years before. They had bought ground and paid for it in new, rough gold. And they refused violently to give any account of themselves.

This was where Cunningham was going. Where the prettiest girl in the world had smiled unconsciously at a camera just four months before. Where a magnificent unknown race was represented in the hodgepodge of New England's later day. Where inquisitive strangers might mysteriously disappear, where certain hostility awaited too much questioning —and where the prettiest girl in the world might possibly be induced to smile.

Cunningham knew it was foolish, but he considered that he had earned the right to be a fool.

Then he looked up. The solid-looking man just opposite him had unfastened his suit-case and taken out a sheaf of magazine pages, neatly clipped together. He began to go through them as if they were totally familiar. Cunningham caught a glimpse of a picture among them, and started. It was the same article from the same magazine that had sent him here.

Then he heard a snarl, as of one who has contained himself until he can do so no longer. His head jerked around and he found himself staring at the foreigner who had seemed so angry. The man had the *Geographic Magazine* in his hand. It was open at the page—the very page—on which the girl was pictured. But the foreigner was looking at the type. Otherwise Cunningham as one in quest of romance and adventure would have felt it necessary to interfere an instant later. Because the foreigner glared at the page as if he had read something that infuriated him past all possible control and suddenly ripped the sheet across and across again, and threw the magazine upon the floor and stamped upon it in a frenzy of rage.

He saw eyes fixed upon him, some startled and some slyly amused. He sat down quivering with wrath and pretended to stare out of the window. But Cunningham saw that his hands were clenching and unclenching as if he imagined that he had something in his grasp which he would rend to bits.

2

THE accommodation train made innumerable stops. It stopped at "South Upton." It puffed into motion and paused at "East Upton." A little later it drew up grandly at "Upton." Then it passed through "North Upton."

The comfortable-looking man opposite Cunningham looked across and smiled.

"Now, if we stop at West Upton," he suggested, "we can go on to a new name."

Cunningham nodded and on impulse pulled the *Geographic Magazine* out of his pocket and held it up.

"Same trail?" he asked.

The other man frowned and looked keenly at him. Then his face relaxed.

"I belong to the lodge," he admitted. "Here's my copy."

Cunningham jerked his head at the third man.

"He had one too. He just tore it up. It seemed to make him mad."

"That so?" The other looked steadily back at the foreign-seeming man, who was staring out of the window with his face pale with fury. "Let's ask him."

He caught the foreigner's eye an instant later and held up the maga-

zine, opened at the article on the Strange People.

"How about it? You going there too?" he asked pleasantly.

The foreigner went purple with fury.

"No!" he gasped, half-strangled with his own wrath. "I do not know what you are talking about!"

He jerked himself around in his seat until they could see only his profile. But they could see his lips moving as if he were muttering savagely to himself.

"My name's Cunningham," said Cunningham. "I want to see those people. They sound sort of interesting."

"And my name's Gray," said the other, shifting to a seat beside Cunningham. "I'm interested, too. I want to hear them talk. Dialect, you know. It's my hobby."

"But they're supposed to talk perfectly good English——" began Cunningham, when he stopped short.

The train had halted leisurely at a tiny station and the conductor was gossiping with an ancient worthy on the station platform. A single passenger had boarded the coach and entered the door. He looked unmistakably unlike the other natives in the car, though he was dressed precisely in the fashion of the average New Englander. But as he came into full view at the end of the aisle he caught sight of the foreign passenger Cunningham had puzzled over.

The newcomer turned a sickly gray in color. He gave a gasp, and then a yell of fear. He turned and bolted from the train, while the foreign passenger started from his seat and with the expression of a devil raced after him. The newcomer darted into a clump of trees and brushwood and vanished. The well-dressed passenger stood quivering on the platform of the day-coach. The conductor gaped at him. The other passengers stared.

Then the well-dressed man came quietly back inside and to his seat. Veins were standing out on his forehead from fury and his hands were shaking with rage. He sat down and stared woodenly out of the window, holding himself still by a terrific effort of will.

Gray glanced sidewise at Cunningham.

"It looks," he observed in a low tone, "as if our trail will have some interesting developments. That man who just ran away was one of the Strange People. He looks like the pictures of them. It ought to be lively up in the hills when our friend yonder arrives. Eh?"

"I—I'll say so," said Cunningham joyously.

He talked jerkily with Gray as the train finished its journey. Without really realizing it, he told Gray nearly everything connected with his journey and his quest. Cunningham was busily weaving wild theories to account for the scene when the first of the Strange People appeared before the third passenger. Otherwise he might have recognized the fact that Gray was very cleverly pumping him of everything he knew. But that did not occur to him until later.

Gray looked more at ease when the train reached Bendale and he and Cunningham sought a hotel together. They saw the third man sending a telegram and, again, arranging for a horse and buggy at a livery stable. He ignored them, but his lips were pressed together in thin, cruel lines.

Cunningham was very well satisfied as he arranged for his room and for a team to take him to Coulters the next day. Ostensibly he was going to try for some fishing, though nothing larger than minnows would be found in that section. But Cunningham considered that the route to romance and adventure was beginning to offer promise.

Still, next morning both he and Gray were startled when the hotelkeeper came to them agitatedly.

"There was three strangers on the train yesterday, wa'n't there?" he asked in a high-pitched voice that trembled with excitement.

"Yes," said Cunningham. "Why?"

"D'ye know the other man?" asked the hotelkeeper excitedly. "Know who he was or anything?"

"No, not at all," Cunningham answered alertly, while Gray listened.

"Would ye recognize him if ye saw him?" quavered the hotelkeeper.

"Of course," said Cunningham. "Why? What's the matter?"

Gray had struck a match to light a cigar, but it burned his fingers as he listened.

"He rented a horse an' buggy last night," quavered the native. "He drove off to Coulters way, he said. An' this mornin' the horse came back with him in the buggy, but he was dead."

"Dead!" Cunningham jumped and found himself growing a trifle pale.

"Yes, dead, that's what he is!" said the innkeeper shrilly. "Them Strange People done it! Because it looks like he was beat to death with clubs an' maybe fifty men was on the job!"

3

The route to romance led through Bendale to Coulters, but now there was a dead man in the way. It had taken youth and hope and several other things to set out as Cunningham had done in the first place. The quest of a pictured smile among a strange people in unfamiliar country is not a thing the average young man can bring himself to. He will be afraid of looking foolish. But to continue on the quest when one has just seen a dead man the girl's own people have killed, more courage still is needed.

Cunningham was not quite so joyous now. He had gone with Gray to identify the foreigner. He had turned sick at the expression on the man's face. He had promised to stay within call for the inquest. And then he and Gray had gone on to Coulters.

Cunningham was not happy. Here was adventure, but it was stark and depressing. And romance. The pictured face was no less appealing and no less ideal. But the picture had been taken four months before. In the interval what might not have happened? Many people were concerned in the killing of the foreigner. Did the girl of the photograph know of it? Was she in the secret of the death that had been dealt out? Did she know who had killed the man, or why?

"You'd a lot better have stayed behind, Cunningham," said Gray, as their team jogged over the country road to the summer boarding-house where they were to stay. "I don't think this is going to be pleasant from now on. No place for a romance-hunter."

"You're not staying back," Cunningham observed. "And you're just following a hobby."

"Umph. That dialect business. Yes," said Gray. His lips twitched grimly. "But a hobby can be as exacting as a profession. Still, I didn't expect to come up here and run slap into a first-class murder."

Gray puffed on his cigar and slapped the horses with the reins.

"The pleasantest part," he added, "is that we shall probably be just about as unwelcome as that chap was last night."

Cunningham did not answer, and they drove in silence for a long time.

Discomforting thoughts assailed Cunningham. He knew as clearly as anyone that it was absurd to grow romantic about a girl merely from a picture. But though it may be absurd, it is by no means uncommon. The obtaining of autographed photo-

graphs from Hollywood ranks with radio as a national occupation. Cunningham was not disturbed by the comparative idiocy of traveling several hundred miles and running into some danger just to see a girl whose picture haunted his dreams. But the thought of finding her involved in such an unpleasant mess as the killing of the foreigner; that was different.

A tidy-minded person would have abandoned the quest at once. He would have abandoned the clearly marked trail to romance and high adventure and gone home. A man who acted upon sober common sense would have done the same thing. But such persons do not ever find romance and very rarely even the mildest of adventures. It takes folly and belief to come at romance!—such folly as enabled Cunningham presently to see his duty clear before him.

Maria needed someone to protect her. She was a Stranger, and the native New Hampshireites hated the Strange People cordially. Cunningham had heard enough at the police station that morning to know that the investigation of the foreigner's killing would be close to a persecution. But if Cunningham were there, near enough to protect the girl who had smiled so shyly yet so pleasantly at the camera, why——

Gray grunted suddenly.

"There's our boarding-house," he said, pointing with the whip. "I suppose the Strange People live up in the hills yonder."

Cunningham stared up at green-clad giants that were tumbled here and there and everywhere in inextricable confusion and grandeur. Hill and valley, vale and mountain, reared up or dipped down until it seemed that as far as the eye could reach the earth had once been a playground of Titans.

A four-square, angular building of typical New England build lay beside the road at the foot of the hills.

"They came here," grunted Gray, waving his whip. "They had gold, rough gold, to buy ground with. Where did they come from and why did they pick out this part of the world to settle in? The soil's too thin to grow anything much but hay. The ground's so rough you have to sow your fields with a shotgun. The biggest crops are stones and summer boarders."

"I'm wondering," said Cunningham, whose thoughts had wandered as his eyes roved the heights, "I'm wondering were they knew that chap that was killed."

"Where they knew him?"

"The Stranger on the train recognized him at first glance. But that chap had a copy of the *Geographic Magazine* and he'd found where they were from that. He had learned about them just as we did."

Gray frowned. Then he looked respectfully at Cunningham.

"You're right. They knew him somewhere, a couple of years ago. But where?"

Cunningham shrugged.

"The article says nowhere."

And the article did. According to the writer, the Strange People were an enigma, an anomaly, and a mystery. And they had just proved that they could be a threat as well.

The livery team drew up before Coulters' solitary building. It was a crossroads post-office and summer hotel with a dreary general store tucked under one wing.

A man was sitting on the porch, smoking. He was watching them intently and as they alighted he rose to greet them.

One glance made Cunningham exclaim under his breath. This man was the counterpart of the foreigner on the train—the one who had been killed. The same olive skin, the same keen and venomous eyes, and even the same too-full lips with their incongruous suggestion of cruelty. He was dressed, too, in the same im-

maculate fashion from meticulously tailored clothes to handmade boots.

"How do you do?" he said politely. "I've been hoping to find you here. You reached Bendale on yesterday's train?"

Gray's face was quite impassive.

"Yes," he admitted.

The foreigner exhibited half a dozen magazine pages. They were the ones containing the article on the Strange People which had brought both Gray and Cunningham to the spot.

"I believe you recognize this?"

Gray nodded, watching the man keenly.

"Before you arrange for rooms," suggested the foreigner, smiling so that his teeth showed unpleasantly, "I would like to speak to you a moment. My brother saw you on the train. He telegraphed for me to meet you here. I may add that I had myself driven all night over very bad roads to get here, and I probably ruined a car in trying to meet you."

"Well?" asked Gray shortly.

The foreigner reached into his pocket and pulled out a thick wallet. He opened it, and an incredible mass of yellow-backed bills was exposed to view.

"In the first place," he said pleasantly, "I would like to offer each of you a present—let us say, five thousand dollars apiece—just to go home and forget that you ever saw that magazine article or ever heard of the Strange People in the hills up there."

4

GRAY turned to the buckboard and began to hand down his suitcases. The last of them was on the ground before he spoke.

"I'm afraid we can't do business," he said without expression. "I am here on a matter of scientific interest. I want to study their dialect. By the way, have you had any news from Bendale this morning?"

The foreigner shook his head impatiently.

"News? No. But if I make it ten thousand——"

"I'm afraid not," said Gray pleasanly. "I'm not in a money-making business. My friend Cunningham may be willing to take you up."

But Cunningham tossed his own suit-cases down.

"No," he said contentedly. "I came here for fun. For adventure, if you choose to put it that way. And anything I'm offered so much to stay out of must be too much fun to miss."

The foreigner gnawed at his fingertips as they started for the hotel.

"Wait a moment," he said urgently. "Perhaps we can still come to some agreement. You wish to study dialect? You wish to find adventure? We may still work together."

"How?" Gray put down his suitcases to light a cigar, while he gazed abstractedly at the foreign-looking man.

"I—I—er—my name is Vladimir," said the foreigner nervously. "I will promise you five thousand dollars each and all assistance in your separate desires. You"—he spoke to Gray—"you will have all opportunities to hear them talk and study their speech. And you, er, you shall have all the adventures the hills afford. If only you will, er, help us to maintain a certain, er, discretion."

Cunningham found himself disliking this man extremely.

"Discretion?" he demanded. "You mean keep our mouths shut?"

Vladimir beamed at him.

"Ah, yes! You are a young man. Adventure? There are pretty girls in the hills. I will give them orders. You will find them fascinating. And five thousand dollars in addition to smiles——"

"Suppose you talk plainly," said Gray shortly, before Cunningham could speak.

"You will find my brother among the Strangers," Vladimir told them eagerly. "You saw him on the train. Find him and tell him of the bargain I have just made with you. And he will tell you just what you may repeat or speak of what you see. And if you agree to work with us I will give you more money. Ten thousand dollars!"

"But what is the work you are planning?" asked Gray, again before Cunningham could reply. Cunningham was seething.

"It would not be wise to say. But the sheriff of the county has agreed to work with us—for a gift, of course—and will assist us with the full force of the law. If he does so, there can be no objection to your aiding us."

"Oh," said Gray gently. "The sheriff's in it too?"

"To be sure. He—he will guide you to my brother," offered Vladimir eagerly. "Do not go inside the hotel. Let the sheriff take you to the hotel where my brother waits. Talk to my brother. And you will earn ten thousand dollars each!"

Cunningham's head began to whirl. Vladimir hadn't heard of the death of his brother. But he had some plan to the detriment of the Strange People, and so obviously of Maria. Otherwise he would not have found it necessary to bribe the sheriff. And yet, both Vladimir and his brother had been at a long distance the day before. They had hurried here on learning where the Strange People were. The Strange People knew them and feared them; might even be hiding especially from them! But why?

Cunningham could not explain it, but he knew that he had not mistaken the route to adventure. Coulters was on the way. But there was a mile and a half still to go.

Gray moved suddenly.

"Cunningham, if you want to take up this proposition——"

Cunningham picked up his bags and moved toward the hotel.

"I can't fill the contract," he said shortly.

"But it is so simple!" protested Vladimir. "Simply talk to my brother——"

Gray was already up on the porch.

"Can't do even that," he said grimly. "You evidently haven't heard. You'd better get Bendale on the 'phone and find out. Your brother was on the train with us yesterday, it's true. He went up to the village of the Strangers last night. But his horse brought his body back this morning. They'd killed him."

Vladimir gasped, and went ashen. Sheer incredulity flashed across his features. Then he believed and was stunned. But there was no grief whatever to be seen on his face. Instead there was a terrible wrath, a rage so beastly and cruel that Cunningham shivered when he saw it.

"They killed him, eh?" he said very softly, like a cat purring. "They dared to kill him, eh? Ah, when I am through with them they will go down on their knees and beg me to kill them! Beg me!"

His eyes were fixed and glassy with fury. Cunningham instinctively looked for the foam of madness to appear upon his lips. But he turned and went softly within the hotel.

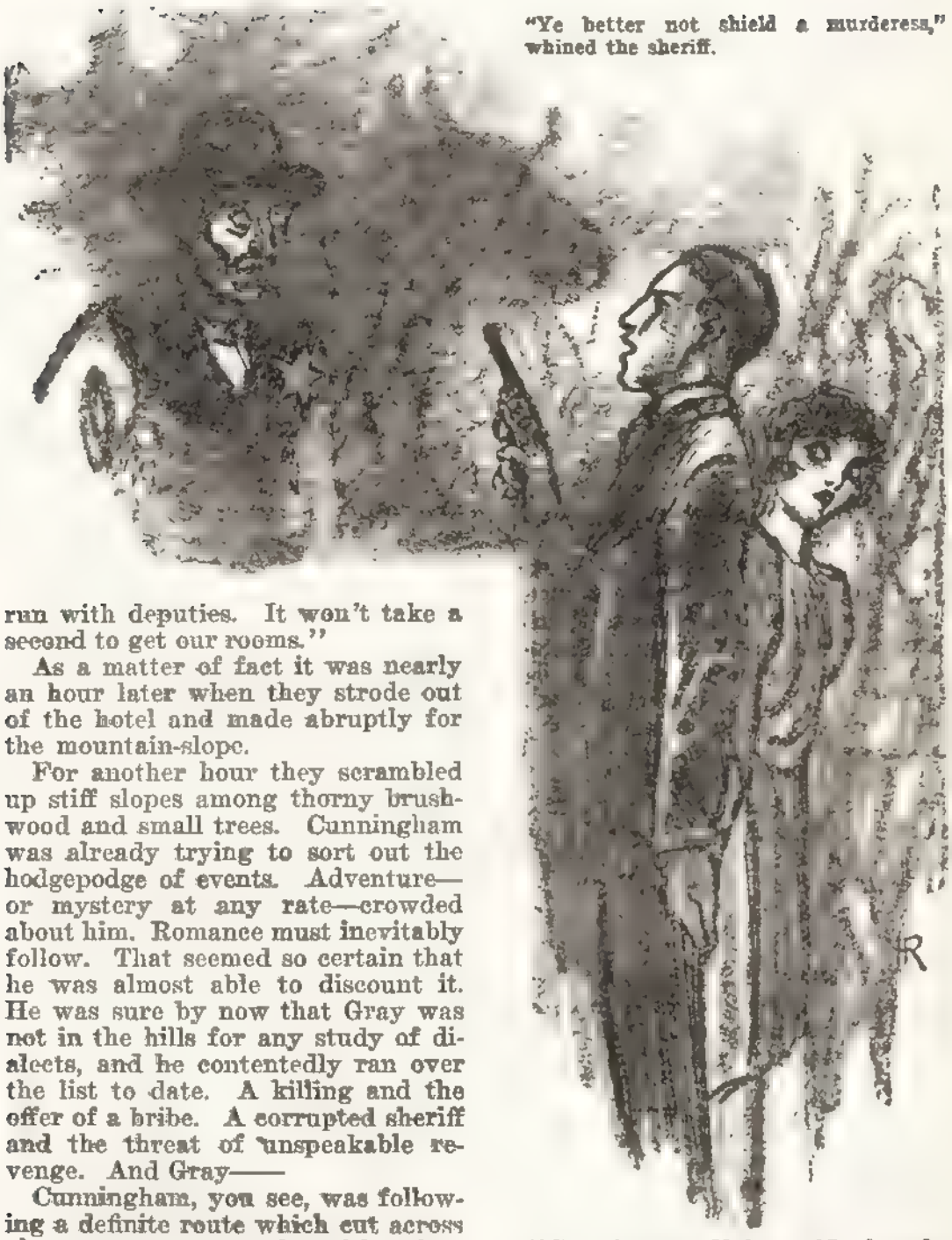
"Charming example of family affection," said Gray. "Why didn't you take his money?"

"I wouldn't miss this," Cunningham told him, "for ten times five thousand. What in blazes is up in those hills?"

"I suggest," Gray said dryly, "that we go and see. Got a gun?"

Cunningham nodded.

"There's no time like the present," grunted Gray. "The sheriff was over here, busily being bribed, when that killing was discovered. Let's get up in the hills before it's over-



"Ye better not shield a murderess," whined the sheriff.

run with deputies. It won't take a second to get our rooms."

As a matter of fact it was nearly an hour later when they strode out of the hotel and made abruptly for the mountain-slope.

For another hour they scrambled up stiff slopes among thorny brushwood and small trees. Cunningham was already trying to sort out the hodgepodge of events. Adventure—or mystery at any rate—crowded about him. Romance must inevitably follow. That seemed so certain that he was almost able to discount it. He was sure by now that Gray was not in the hills for any study of dialects, and he contentedly ran over the list to date. A killing and the offer of a bribe. A corrupted sheriff and the threat of unspeakable revenge. And Gray——

Cunningham, you see, was following a definite route which cut across common sense and sanity. Therefore he kept his eyes open more widely than Gray. And therefore he was tingling all over with a not altogether pleasant thrill when Gray turned on him suddenly.

"Cunningham," he said sharply, "tell me the truth for once. Why did you come up here? Who sent you?"

Cunningham grinned, casting little side-glances at the trees about him.

"Nobody," he said joyously. "I came up here for adventure and for romance. And I'm finding them. For instance, there are half a dozen people hiding behind those trees and watching us."

"The devil!" Gray stopped short and stared about him. It was a creepy feeling to realize that they were being spied upon from the woods. Suddenly he saw a furtive movement as a blurred figure slipped from behind one trunk to another. Its figure was that of a man, but he could see nothing else about it. "Creepy, eh?" said Gray grimly.

"There's a girl with them," Cunningham told him. "*The* girl. Maria."

But Gray rushed suddenly at a clump of brushwood as if to seize something hiding there. A human figure started up and plunged away. And then something came flicking through the air, glittering, and stuck fast in a tree-trunk with a dull "*ping!*" It was a long-bladed knife, and it had missed Gray's throat by inches.

And without a word or a sign the air seemed suddenly full of the little flickering flames which were knife-blades glittering in the sunlight. And which, also, were death.

5

CUNNINGHAM flung himself down on the ground. His revolver came out instinctively, but he shouted, "We're friends, you idiots! Friends!"

There was no answer, but the knives stopped their silent rush through the air. It seemed as if the hidden men in the forest were debating in whispers, and the stillness was deadly. Cunningham lay still, gradually worming his revolver around to a convenient position for firing. He was tingling all over, but he found himself thinking with a supreme irrelevance that he thought he had seen the girl whose picture crackled in his breast pocket as he moved. He was quite sure of it.

He stood up suddenly and began to dust himself off. It was taking a chance, but it was wise. A young man stepped out from among the trees near by.

"You are our friends?" the young man demanded skeptically. "We have no friends."

His speech had but the faintest of slurs in it, a teasing soft unfamiliarity which pricked one's curiosity but could never be identified in any one syllable, much less put down in print.

Cunningham felt an abrupt relief, and quite as abruptly wanted to swear. He knew that this was the end of the route to romance and that the girl, Maria, was peering out from the tangled underbrush. And he had dived head foremost into a patch of loam and looked most unromantic. Therefore he said wrathfully, "If we weren't your friends, don't you think we'd have plugged into you with our gats? We saw you. You know that!"

The young man stared at him and Cunningham tried to rub the dirt off his nose and look dignified at the same time, thinking of the girl behind the trees.

Then the young man said skeptically, "What is a gat?"

"A revolver. A pistol. A handgun," snapped Cunningham. "We'd have wiped out the lot of you."

The man searched his face unbelievingly. A murmur came from somewhere behind him.

"Show me," he said. He came boldly out from the brushwood and faced Cunningham squarely.

He was no older than Cunningham, but Cunningham instantly envied him his build. He was magnificently made and splendidly muscled—as were all the Strangers, as Cunning-

ham learned later. He met Cunningham's eyes frankly, yet defiantly.

Cunningham turned to where Gray still lay sprawled out in a heap of brush. Imperturbable puffs of smoke rose in the still woodland air.

"Go ahead and charm them, Cunningham," said Gray's voice dryly. "I'm under cover and I'll start shooting if they start anything."

"Show me that you could have killed us," repeated the young man, facing Cunningham. "Use this thing you have."

Cunningham held out his revolver. The Stranger looked at it curiously but impassively. He seemed totally unfamiliar with its nature or use.

"Great guns!" demanded Cunningham in exasperation. "Don't you know what it is?"

The young man hesitated and then shook his head.

"No. I do not know what it is."

He waited defiantly as Cunningham gaped at him. People in these United States who had never seen a revolver! He grunted.

"All right, I'll show you, then."

He picked up a bit of weather-rotted rock and set it up for a target. He drew off ten paces and leveled his pistol. He fired, and half the rock flew to fragments. It was seamed and cracked by the freezings and thawings of many years.

The young man flinched at the sound.

"It is like a shotgun," he observed calmly. "You can use it twice. And then?"

He tapped the hilt of his knife suggestively.

"Then this," snapped Cunningham.

He fired again and again and again. The rock was splinters.

"And I've still two shots left," he observed grimly. "My friend yonder has six more. If we were not your friends would we have waited for you to chuck rocks at us?"

The young man debated. He inspected Cunningham's face again.

"N-no," he admitted. "Perhaps not. But why did you come here?"

Cunningham reached into his pocket and flipped the torn-out pages of the magazine article to him.

"Look at the pictures. That's why I came," he said grimly. "And if you want to know more——"

The young man had cried out in astonishment. He turned and beckoned to the woods behind him. A second man appeared. Then a third. They stared at the pictures, fumbling them with their fingers.

The young man turned once more to Cunningham with a very pale face.

"Tell us," he begged. "How did these come to be? Tell us! If you are our friends, tell us everything!"

For all his blank astonishment, Cunningham realized that he had made a bull's-eye.

For ten minutes he talked to them, at first in commonplace speech, and as he realized that the most ordinary of technical terms meant nothing to them, he spoke as if to children. He watched their faces and explained until he saw comprehension dawn. And he became filled with a vast incredulity. These people spoke grammatical English, better than the native New Englanders. But they knew nothing of revolvers, though they had seen shotguns and rifles. They knew nothing of cameras, though they could read and write. And they were in a civilized state of a civilized nation! Only the most passionately preserved isolation and an incredible ignorance to begin with could account for it.

They listened intently. Now and again another figure crept out of the wood. They were sitting in a semicircle about him now, watching his face as he spoke. Old men, young men, but no sign of the girl. Presently the younger men began to comment to one another on what

Cunningham was saying. Gray got up and sat down more comfortably with his back against a boulder. The comments of the younger men were low-voiced, and sometimes one or another of them smiled. Presently a little chuckle ran about the circle.

Cunningham stammered. He felt like a fool, explaining that he was here because of an article in a magazine, and then having to explain what a magazine was, what a camera was, and all the rest. It was when the feeling of folly was strongest upon him that the chuckle went around. And then he noted that the young men had been quietly retrieving the knives they had sent flickering through the air. Everyone now had his knife back in his belt and was fingering its hilt while he gazed smilingly at Cunningham.

The smiles were bland and friendly, but a feeling of horror came to him. They were playing with him! They were pretending to listen to him, but actually they were toying with him as a cat toys with a mouse. They ringed him about, now, thirty or more of them. From time to time they edged closer to him. And one of them would ask a question in that teasing soft unfamiliar dialect of theirs, which you could not put your finger on. And he would edge a little closer, and smile.

Sweat came out on Cunningham's forehead. He felt as if he were in a nightmare. The smiles were terrifying. They masked a sinister purpose, a deadly and unspeakable purpose. Cunningham was remembering the dead man he had seen that morning. Some of these men had done him to death. Now they were edging closer to him, feigning to listen and feigning to smile.

He turned and found half a dozen of them very close to his back. He whirled back again and saw that they had edged closer while his back was turned. They sat upon the ground with their eyes fixed intently upon him, and smiled when he looked at them, and asked questions in their soft and unfamiliar accent. And always they moved closer. . . .

Cunningham felt that his teeth would begin to chatter in an instant. And suddenly a look of intelligence passed from one to another. A signal!

6

Cunningham suddenly swung his pistol out. He was sweating in the horror they had inspired. Once they came for him he would be calm enough, but this ghoulish waiting until he should be momentarily off his guard was ghastly. He flung out his pistol in a wide arc.

"I'll show you some target practise," he said suddenly. "Clear a lane over there."

He waved his hand and they parted reluctantly. Now and then they exchanged glances. He could see some of them peering about, as if looking to make sure that no one else was within sight. Cunningham managed to snatch a glance at Gray. Gray was staring at him with a queer distaste, and Cunningham tried to explain what he planned with a significant look. He'd clear a path for a rush, and then they could stand these people off.

He slipped fresh shells in place of the exploded ones.

"Now I'll hit that tree-trunk over there," he said sharply. Gray should understand and be ready to leap up. "Watch the bark fly."

But Gray was sitting quite still. He was regarding Cunningham suspiciously.

"Like this," snapped Cunningham. He glanced at Gray and made an almost imperceptible motion for him to jump up. They'd have to run for it in a moment.

He pressed on the trigger, and his eyes came back to the sights just as the hammer was falling. It was too

late to stop the explosion and his heart stood still. From behind the very tree-trunk he was aiming at a girl's face had peered.

From sheer instinct he jerked at the weapon almost before his brain had registered his impression. It went off with a roar, and as the echoes died away he heard the rattling of several twigs falling to the ground.

Cunningham gasped and the revolver nearly fell from his hands as he saw her still standing there, gazing interestedly at him. He rushed toward her, his terror of an instant before all forgotten.

"I might have killed you!" he gasped. "Are you hurt? Are you?"

Her eyes opened wide and she flushed faintly. She moved as if to flee. Then she glanced at the Strangers grouped about the place Cunningham had left and stepped out into the open.

"You—you made a very loud noise," she said uncertainly. "That was all."

It was the Girl. It was Maria, whose picture Cunningham had treasured and about whom he had day-dreamed. At another time he might have risen to the high heroic moment. He might have appeared in better guise. But in the transcendent relief of finding her safe his wrought-up emotions found escape in the form of rage. He whirled on the Strangers.

"Why didn't you tell me she was there?" he demanded furiously. His horror of a moment before had vanished completely. He was angry enough to have waded into the bunch bare-handed. "You knew she was there! Damn it, I might have killed her! I might have shot her! Idiots!" he cried, half sobbing from relief; "you let me come close to killing her!"

Gray was still staring at him curiously.

"If you really mean these people well, Cunningham——" he was beginning curtly, when Cunningham turned to the girl again.

"Please forgive me," he begged, still white and shaking from his scare. "I didn't know you were there!"

Her eyes met his wonderingly. Then the expression in them changed. She read the terror and understood its cause. She smiled shyly.

"I was safe. My friends were there."

She meant the thirty or more Strangers, staring puzzledly at Cunningham and bewildered by his evident horror. Cunningham's head cleared with a jerk. He felt more than ever like a fool. All men are tempted to feel that way in the presence of a pretty girl, if only to keep the pretty girl company, but Cunningham saw that the Strangers were honestly at a loss. There had been no secret purpose. They were as incredibly uninformed as they had seemed and they had been listening with all the attention their actions had displayed.

"Look here," said Cunningham abjectly, "I guess I seem like a fool to you, Maria, but I did come here only to see you. I—I've been day-dreaming about you. Let me show you why I was scared and you'll understand what it would have meant if I had hit you."

He took her hand and fitted it to the pistol-grip. He put her finger on the trigger.

"Now, point it off that way," he went on anxiously, "squeeze on this thing. . . ."

There was the swift thudding of horses' hoofs. A nasal voice cried shrilly, "Halt in th' name of th' law!"

Cunningham started and instinctively held fast to his revolver, which someone seemed trying to jerk away. He caught a glimpse of flying figures melting into the woods. Then he

saw two men on horseback plunging up to the spot. One wore a bright star on his chest and the other carried a rifle.

"There, naow!" the sheriff of the county exclaimed, panting. "I got one of 'em, even if it was a girl."

He lunged from his horse and seized Maria, who was wrenching frantically to get her finger out of the trigger-guard Cunningham had held tightly.

She flashed a glance of bitter hatred at Cunningham.

"Easy," said Cunningham with sudden heat. "What are you arresting her for? I was showing her how to shoot a revolver."

"No thanks to ye for that, then," panted the sheriff. "Here, Joel, come an' help me get the cuffs on her."

Cunningham brought down a heavy hand on the sheriff's arm.

"What's this for?" he demanded hotly. "I didn't hold her for you!"

"I'm arrestin' her for murder, that's what. She's one of them Strange People, she is. An' they killed that furriner last night. You know that. You saw him this mornin'. Mr. Vladimir told me. Joel, come here an' help me. Help me get her hands in these cuffs."

Cunningham wrenched the sheriff's hands free.

"Don't be a fool," he snapped angrily. "That killing was the work of men! This girl had nothing to do with it!"

"I warn ye not to interfere with the law!" growled the sheriff.

"I'm not interfering with the law," said Cunningham hotly. "I'm interfering with your doing what Vladimir's bribed you to do! This girl would never get to jail. Vladimir's much too anxious to get some of the Strangers in his hands. Hands off!"

He thrust the girl behind him, where she cowered for a moment.

"Get out of here," snapped Cunningham. "And you start something about my resisting the law and I'll start something about your taking bribes! Clear out and leave this girl alone!"

"Ye better not shield a murderer——" whined the sheriff uneasily.

"If you want murderers, look for men," said Cunningham coldly. "Then I won't stop you. But stick to the law, Sheriff, and forget about Vladimir."

He drew back with the girl behind him and his eyes blazing. The revolver that had snared the girl was still clutched in his hand. The sheriff gazed at him venomously.

"I'll tend to ye," he said uncertainly.

"Try it," Cunningham growled as he watched the two men ride slowly away. He watched until they had disappeared. Then he turned to Maria.

She was gone.

Cunningham stared blankly, then grinned sheepishly at Gray.

"I guess that was foolish, maybe," he apologized, "but he made me mad."

Gray was white as a sheet, but he tried to smile as he got up stiffly.

"You did good work for me," he said grimly. "Look at my coat."

He turned and showed a little rip in the back.

"When those chaps made for the woods," he said grimly, "one of them dropped behind my own particular boulder and stuck the point of a knife in my back. If the sheriff had taken that girl off, the knife would have been sunk in me. Ugh! Let's go back to Coulters."

7

The hills rose until they blotted out half the stars, and the moonlight on their tree-clad slopes was like a screen of opaque lace against the sky. Utter solitude seemed to

surround the little summer boarding-house. No other house was in view. No lights burned in the houses the Strange People must occupy in the hills. All was silence.

Gray stood up and tossed away his last cigar.

"I'm going to turn in," he said at last. "It's too much for me. By the way, I may be gone before you get up in the morning."

"Leaving?" asked Cunningham.

He and Gray had been talking fruitlessly, trying to piece together what they knew of Vladimir with what they had seen of the Strangers, and attempting to figure out the connection between the two. They had decided that the Strangers' attack upon them had been due to Gray's rush at one of the hidden figures. That their hiding was due to the fact that they had killed Vladimir's brother and were afraid of arrest. But they could concoct no theory as to why Vladimir had sought them out, or where he could have known them, or why he was willing to spend any amount of money to have a free hand with them. Certainly they could not understand what he would gain besides revenge, or even how he could set about taking that in a civilized country.

"No, not leaving," said Gray. He yawned. "You don't care to confide in me, Cunningham? About your real reason for being here?"

Cunningham grinned. The route he had followed had not misled him. Adventure and romance were certainly about him. He had seen Maria, and she was perfect. And there was promise of more excitement.

"I've told you," he said cheerfully. "I came here for fun. Why not tell me why you came?"

Gray smiled.

"Dialect, of course." His tone admitted that he did not expect Cunningham to believe it. "I'll send some wires and be back by noon. Watch your step while I'm gone. I think Vladimir would feel happier with you in jail."

"I know he would," said Cunningham. "But there's something crooked going on. I shall object pretty strenuously to being arrested."

Gray laughed.

"I think you will," he admitted. "But today I thought you were just trying to hold the Strangers in talk until the sheriff could reach them unheard. I think they thought the same."

"I didn't hear the son-of-a-gun," said Cunningham.

Gray yawned again on his way to the door.

"I knew it when you fought to keep that girl from being arrested. Didn't you notice I told you about the knife at my back right away? So that the Strangers would hear me? I wanted them to know you'd kept her free on your own hook, not to save my life. That ought to make them believe in you somewhat."

"But why did you want to make me solid with them?" demanded Cunningham.

"Oh, you might help me later," said Gray dryly, "in studying their dialect."

He disappeared, and Cunningham frowned out at the darkness for a long time. It was a puzzling mix-up, and it might prove a dangerous one. Gray had been close to death that afternoon and one man had been killed. But Cunningham could not find it in his heart to dwell upon anything, now, but Maria. She was—different. Cunningham dwelt upon her image in his memory with increasing contentment. Sometimes a man sees a woman and without even any feeling of surprize realizes that it is she whom he has been waiting for all his life. It is more of a recognition than a meeting. Cunningham felt that way about Maria.

But he forced his brain to a last effort to understand the mystery into which he had dropped. Vladimir offering bribes to keep other people from the Strangers he hated, and the Strangers with their incredible lack of knowledge of American commonplaces.

"Vladimir's crazy, or I'm crazy, and maybe all of us are crazy," he muttered as he tossed his cigarette over the porch railing. "I'm going to bed."

He went up the stairs by the light of the turned-down lamp in the hall and fumbled with his key in the lock. He opened his door and struck a match. Then he uttered an angry exclamation.

A moment later he had lighted his lamp and was searching among his tumbled-about possessions for a sign of theft.

Someone had entered his room and searched his suit-cases thoroughly. His clothes had been ransacked. A bundle of letters and papers had been read and strewn on the floor. It looked as if every seam of his garments had been searched for hidden clues to his identity or motive in visiting Coulters and the Strange People.

Nothing was missing, but everything had been examined. Cunningham felt his anger mounting. Vladimir, of course. Why didn't the man want him there? What was he suspected of?

There was a gentle tapping at his window and Cunningham looked up with an increase of savagery. But—two faces were looking in at him. One was Maria, smiling a little. The other was a Stranger of middle age or over.

She put her finger to her lips and motioned for him to lift the window. Cunningham strode over and thrust it up. It was latched from the inside and the necessity of unfastening it dispelled a flash of suspicion that had come to him.

"This is my father, Stephan," whispered Maria. "We must talk to you."

The older man slipped into the room and after an instant's hesitation held out his hand. He looked weary and worn.

"I could not come any other way," he said slowly, picking his words with a trace of difficulty. "I would have had to kill the sheriff. But I wished to thank you, for Maria."

She had slipped in behind him and sat down on a chair. Stephan waited until Cunningham motioned him to another. There he sat quietly, fingering the hilt of his knife and looking at Cunningham with grave and not unfriendly eyes.

CUNNINGHAM was hopelessly at sea, but he felt a little tingling feeling of comfort. He looked at Maria, and there was an infinite deal of satisfaction in the glance. It was as if he saw her and knew with perfect certitude that some day she must love him. For himself, with sublime confidence he knew that his dreams were justified. It was insane, perhaps, but such things do happen. One worships very many girls, very earnestly, and then quite suddenly one glimpses another girl and—well, one *knows*.

Stephan's voice broke the silence again.

"I came," he said heavily, "to thank you for keeping Maria from being taken away. And I ask you if you are our friend, as you said. And why you came here."

Cunningham pondered the reply he should make. He saw Maria looking at him with a curious expression of dawning recognition, of surprized intentness. He glanced up and she flushed slightly. Very abruptly he saw that she had read his expression and that she was discovering the same odd certitude. Their eyes met for the fraction of a second. And then—it was as if there were no more need

to speak. She flushed a vivid red, and after that her eyes had difficulty in meeting his.

That, also, was insanity. But such things happen likewise.

"I am your friend," said Cunningham gruffly, "if Vladimir isn't. I dislike that man."

His heart was pounding loudly, though no word had passed between Maria and himself. Stephan eyed him steadily.

"But I'm getting tired," added Cunningham, "of explaining why I came here and where I came from. Nobody believes me. But you didn't come to ask me those things only."

"No," said Stephan harassedly. "We came to ask you what to do."

"About what?"

"All things," said Stephan fiercely. "A man was killed. You know that. There is another man here. You call him Vladimir, and he will have to be killed also. And the sheriff comes and tries to take us away. What shall we do?"

Cunningham had trouble in thinking of an answer. He wanted to talk to Maria. He wanted to take her to one side and say innumerable things.

"About the first man," he said at random, "you ought to get a lawyer to advise you. And keep out of the way of Vladimir and the sheriff until he can tell you what you ought to do."

Stephan's face mirrored a resolute despair.

"No. We will not do that. He would ask who we were and why we killed that other man."

"He might," agreed Cunningham lightheartedly. He wanted desperately to talk to Maria. "People do that sort of thing around here."

Stephan looked at his daughter questioningly. She nodded, with shining eyes that evaded Cunningham's. Stephan tugged at his belt and placed something on the floor before him. He unknotted a string about a coarse cloth bag and poured out upon the floor a shining heap of gold-pieces. But they were not like any gold-pieces Cunningham had ever seen before. They were hammered from nuggets or bars by hand. They were square, about the size of a double-eagle and twice as thick, and still showed the marks of the hammer that had formed them.

"We will give you these," he said quietly, "if you will get us gats like the one you showed my people today."

"Gats? Oh . . . guns. Pistols."

Stephan nodded and swept the gold-pieces into a shining array. The sight of them sobered Cunningham abruptly.

"But what will you do with them?" he asked. "How will you use them? What do you want them for?"

Stephan spread out his hands.

"Then we will not need a lawyer," he said grimly. Cunningham caught his meaning.

"How many people do you chaps plan to kill with them?"

Stephan smiled sadly.

"Not many. Only until we are left alone."

"You people do need a guardian," growled Cunningham. Maria was watching him with soft eyes that always just evaded meeting his. Cunningham felt that a tremendous responsibility was being thrust upon him. "Look here——"

There was a sharp knock at the door.

Cunningham hurled himself at the doorway to bar entrance until Stephan and Maria should have time to get away. All the Strangers were considered outlawed now. Cunningham had only their safety in mind, but Stephan misread his swiftness of movement. With lightninglike quickness he was on his feet with bared knife, darting likewise to the doorway.

Cunningham's hand came down with a jerk. The knife flew from Stephan's hand and stuck quivering in the floor. The next second Cunningham's revolver was out.

"Steady!" he whispered sharply. "Steady!"

Then Maria had flung herself in front of the revolver. All this was done in fractions of seconds and almost without sound.

"You shall not let him be taken!" she whispered fiercely. "You shall not!"

Stephan's whole frame was alert and his eyes were flaming as if he were sure this was a trap and waited but the ghost of a chance to seize his knife and rush Cunningham as well as whoever might be outside.

To take his eyes from the man was to risk his life. To refuse to answer the knock was to take another risk. The knock came again, sharp and peremptory. A hand tried the door. And there was a tiny sound by the window, as if other Strangers were without, peering in suspiciously and ready to fling their flying knives at a hint of danger.

8

Maria defied Cunningham without words. And Cunningham saw her father's hand stealing to a part of her dress where a weapon might be concealed. Sweat came out on his forehead. He could not shoot, and in another instant——

Then the defiance in her eyes turned to pleading and the deliberate wordless reiteration of the thing he had read in her face before. Cunningham spoke suddenly in a fierce whisper.

"I love you!" he cried softly and desperately. "Do you think I will let harm come to your father?"

The terror faded from her eyes and without a sound she clasped her father's hands fast in her own, though still before him. Stephan stood tense, watching Cunningham through eyes that showed nothing whatever.

Cunningham turned his head.

"Who's there?" he called. The answer was an anticlimax.

"Gray," said Gray's voice dryly. "I say—if you want to send any mail or telegrams, you'd better give them to me. I think they'd be opened, here."

"I know they would," Cunningham growled. "But I won't have anything to go out. Anything else? I'm in bed," he added as an afterthought.

"No. Nothing else." Gray's tone was very dry. Cunningham heard his footsteps retreating.

He silently picked up Stephan's knife and handed it back. He replaced his pistol in his pocket.

"It's dangerous to talk here," he said grimly. "I suppose these partitions are thin. Let me come up to the hills tomorrow. I'll tell you anything I can to help you. But please don't kill anybody else until I've had time to explain. Don't you understand that you can't get away with that sort of thing in the United States? Where did you come from, anyhow?"

Stephan smiled faintly. He ignored the whisper to Maria of a moment before. He suddenly reached over and put his hand on Cunningham's shoulder.

"Good man," he said gravely. "We will talk to you, yes. But we will not tell you anything. Come up into the hills tomorrow. We will kill nobody else until you say."

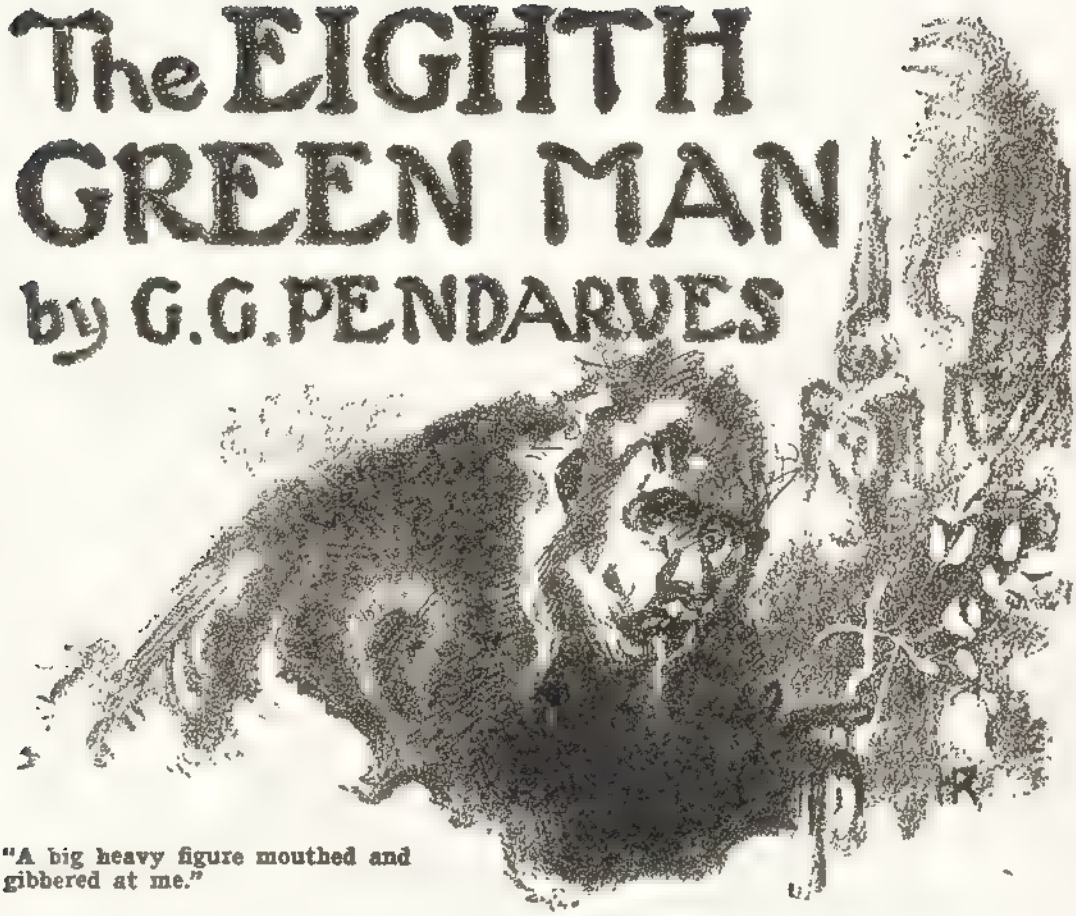
"But—I tell you you mustn't kill anybody at any time," protested Cunningham anxiously. "You can't get away with it. Don't you understand?"

"No," said Stephan. He spread out his hands in a confession of des-

(Continued on page 428)

The EIGHTH GREEN MAN

by G. G. PENDARVES



"A big heavy figure mouthed and gibbered at me."

DANGEROUS road, huh!" Nicholas Birkett slowed down and frowned at the battered old sign-post. "I'll take a chance, anyhow!"

"I should try another road," I said abruptly.

"But this one leads right down to the valley, and will save at least ten miles round."

"It's a dangerous road—very dangerous," I answered, with the conviction growing fast within me that the sign-post gave only a faint inkling of the deadly peril it guarded.

Birkett stared at me, his big brown hands resting on the steering-wheel. "What d'ye know about the road, anyhow?" he asked, his round blue eyes blank with amazement. "You've never been this way in your life before!"

I hesitated. My name is famous in more than one continent as that of an explorer, and I had recently achieved an expedition across the Sahara Desert which had added immensely to my fame. In fact it was my lecture on this expedition, given in New York, that had brought about my friendship with Nicholas Birkett. He had introduced himself and carried me off to stay with him at his country estate in Connecticut, in a whirlwind of enthusiastic interest and admiration.

How could I make my companion understand the shuddering fear that gripped me? I—Raoul Suliman

d'Abre—to whom the face of Death was as familiar as my own.

But it was not Death that confronted us on that road marked "Dangerous" . . . something far less kind and merciful!

Not for nothing am I the son of a French soldier and an Arab woman! Not for nothing was I born in Algeria and grew up amidst the mysteries and magic of Africa. Not for nothing have I learnt in pain and terror that the walls of this visible world are frail and thin—too frail, too thin, alas! For there are times—there are places when the barrier is broken . . . when monstrous unspeakable Evil enters and dwells familiarly amongst us!

"Well!" My companion grew impatient, and began to move the car's nose toward the road on our left.

"I'm sorry," I answered. "The truth is . . . it's a bit difficult to explain . . . but I have my reasons—very strong reasons—for not wishing to go down this particular road. I *know*—don't ask me how—that it's horribly dangerous. It would be a madness—a sin to take that way!"

"But look here, old chap, you can't mean that you . . . that . . . that you're only imagining things about it?" His face was quite laughable in its astonishment.

I was frightfully embarrassed. How explain to such a rank materialist as Nicholas Birkett that instinct alone warned me against that road? How make a man so insensitive and practical believe in any danger he could not see or handle? He believed in neither God nor Devil! He had only a passionate belief in himself, his wealth, his business acumen, and above all, the physical perfection that went to make his life easy and pleasant.

"There are so many things you do not understand," I said slowly. "I am too old a campaigner to be ashamed of acknowledging that there are some dangers I think it foolhardy to face. This road is one of them!"

"But what in thunder do *you* know of the damned road?" Birkett's big fresh-colored face turned a brick-red in his angry impatience. Then he cooled down suddenly and put a heavy hand on my knee. "You're ill, old chap! Touch of malaria, I suppose! Excuse my beinig so darned hasty!"

I shook my head. "You won't or can't understand me! The truth is that I feel the strongest aversion from that path, and I beg you not to take it."

Birkett looked me in the eye and began to argue. He settled down to it solidly. I had nothing to back my arguments except my intuition, and such a flimsy nothing as this he demolished with his big hearty laugh, and a heavy elephantine humor that reduced me to a helpless silence.

Opposition always narrowed Birkett down to one idea, that of proving himself right; and at last I said, "This is more dangerous for you than for me. I am prepared . . . I know how to guard myself from attack, but you——"

"That settles it," he interrupted, gripping the wheel and shooting forward with a jerk. "I can look after myself." His cheerful bellow echoed hollowly as the car dived into the leafy roadway under a branching archway of trees.

2

Birkett became more and more boisterous in his mirth as we sped along, for the road continued smooth and virtually straight, descending in a gentle slope to the Naugatuck valley.

"Dangerous road!" he said, with a prolonged chuckle; "I'll bet a china orange to a monkey that sign means a good long drink. Look out for an innocent little roadhouse tucked away down here. Dangerous road! I sup-

pose that's the latest way of advertising the stuff."

It was useless to remonstrate, but I noticed many things I didn't like along that broad leafy lane.

No living creature moved there—no bird sang—no stir of wings broke the silence of the listening trees—not even a fly moved across our path.

Behind us we had left a world of life, of movement and color. Here all was green and silent. The dark columns of the tree-trunks shut us in like the massive bars of a prison.

Shadows moved softly across the pale, dusty road ahead; shadows that clustered in strange groups about us; shadows not cast by cloud or sun or moving object in our path, for these shadows had no relation to things natural or human.

I knew them! I knew them, and shuddered to recognize their hateful presence.

"You're a queer fellow, d'Abre," my companion rallied me. "You'd waltz out on a camel to meet a horde of yelling, bloodthirsty ruffians in the desert, and thoroughly enjoy the game. Yet here, in a civilized country, you see danger in a peaceful hillside! You certainly are a wonder!"

"*Imshallah!*" I murmured under my breath. "It is more wonderful that man can be so blind!"

"Are you muttering curses?" Birkett showed white teeth in a flashing grin at my discomfiture. "I suppose it's the Arab half of you that invents these ghosts and devils. Life in the desert must need a few imaginary excitements. But in this country it needs something more than imagination to produce a really lively sort of devil. Something with a good kick to it."

Suddenly, ahead of us, the trees began to thin out, and we caught a glimpse of a low white building to our left. Birkett was triumphant.

"What did I tell you?" he cried. "Here I am leading you straight to a perfectly good drink, and you sit there babbling of death and disaster!"

He stopped the car before a short flight of mossy steps; from the top of them we stood and looked at the house, glimmering palely in the dusky shade of many tall trees.

A flagged path led from where we stood to the house—a straight white path about fifty yards in length. On each side of it the tall, rank grass, dotted with trees and shrubs, stretched back to the verge of the encroaching forest. And within this spacious, parklike enclosure the distant house looked dwarfed and mean—a sort of fungus sprouting at the foot of the stately trees.

Birkett, undeterred by the menacing gloom of the whole place, cupped his hands about his mouth and gave a joyful shout, which echoed and died into heavy silence once more.

"Not expecting visitors," he grinned. "This is a midnight joint, I'll wager. Come on!"

At that moment we saw a sign at our elbow—a freshly painted sign—the lettering in a vivid luminous green on a black ground. It read:

"THE SEVEN GREEN MEN."

3

"SEVEN Green Men, hey! Don't see 'em," said Birkett, moving up the pathway. I followed, looking round intently, every nerve in me sending to my brain its warning thrill of naked, overwhelming terror crouching on every hand, ready to spring, ready to destroy us body and soul.

Then, suddenly I saw them! . . . and my heart gave a great leap in my body. They faced us as we approached the house, their grim silhouettes sharp and distinct against the white roadhouse behind.

The Seven Green Men!

"Gee!" said Birkett. "Will you

look at those trees? Seven Green Men! What d'you think about that?"

In two stiff rows before the house they stood, each one cut and trimmed to the height of a tall man. Their foliage was dense and unlike that of any tree or shrub I had seen in all my wanderings. A few feet away, their overlapping leaves gave all the illusion of metal, and seven tall warriors seemed to stand in rank before us, their armor green with age and disuse.

Each figure faced the west, presenting its left side to us; each bared head was that of a man shaved to the scalp; each profile was cut with marvelous cunning, and each was distinct and characteristic; the one thing in common was the eyelid, which in every profile appeared closed in sleep.

And when I say *sleep,* I mean just that.

They could awaken, those Seven Green Men! . . . they could awaken to life and action; their roots were not planted in the kindly earth, but thrust down deep into hell itself.

"The Seven Green Men! Well, what d'you think of that for an idea?" And my companion planted his feet firmly apart, clasped his hands behind his broad back, and gazed in puzzled admiration at the trees. "Some gardener here, d'Abre! I'd like to have a word with him. Wonder if he'd come and do a bit of work like that for me? A few of these green fellows would look fine in my own place. Beats me how the faces are cut so differently; must need trimming every day! Yes, I'll say that's some gardener!"

I put my hand on his arm.

"Don't you—can't you see they're not just trees? Come away while there's time, Birkett." And I tried to draw him back from those cursed green men, who, even in sleep, seemed to be watching my resistance to them with sardonic interest. "This place is horrible . . . foul, I tell you!"

"I came for a drink, and if these green fellows can't produce it, I'll pull their noses for them!" His laugh rang and echoed in that silent place. As it died, the door of the inn was opened quickly and a man stood on its threshold.

For a long moment the three of us stood looking at each other, and my blood turned to ice as I saw the great massive figure of the innkeeper. Most smooth and urbane he was, that smiling devil! . . . most punctilious and deferential in manner as he summed us both up, gaged our characters, our powers of resistance, our usefulness to him in the vast scheme of his infernal design.

He came down the flagged path toward us, passing through the stiff, silent rank of the seven green men —four on one side of the path, three on the other.

"Good morning, sirs, good morning! How can I serve you?" His high, whispering voice was a shock; it seemed indecent issuing from that gigantic frame, and I saw from Birkett's quick frown that it grated on him too.

"If you've got a drink wet enough to quench my thirst, I'd be almighty glad," answered my friend, rather gruffly. "And about lunch . . . we might try what your green men can do for us!"

Our host gave a long snickering laugh, and glanced back at the seven trees as though inviting them to share the joke.

He bowed repeatedly. "No doubt of that, sir! No doubt of that! If you'll come this way, we'll give you some of the best—the *very* best." His whisper broke on a high squeak. "Lunch will be served in ten minutes."

I put a desperate hand on Birkett's arm as he began to follow in the wake of the innkeeper.

"Not past *them*, not past *them!*" I urged in a low voice. "Look at them now!"

As we approached, the trees seemed to quiver and ripple as though some inner force stirred within their leafy forms, and from each lifted eyelid a sudden flickering glance gleamed and vanished.

Beneath my hand I felt Birkett's involuntary start, but he shook me off impatiently. "Go back, if you like, d'Abre! You'll get me imagining as crazy things as you do, soon." And he stalked on to the house.

4

"ENTER, enter, sirs! My house is honored!"

Unaccountably, as we passed the threshold my horror gave place to a fierce determination to fight—to resist this monstrous swollen spider greedy to catch his human flies.

Power against power—knowledge against knowledge—I would fight while strength and wisdom remained in me.

I waved away the proffered drink.

"No, nothing to drink," I said, watching his smooth pale face pucker at this first check in the game.

"Surely, sir, you will drink! You will not refuse to pledge the luck of my house! You are a great man—a great leader of men, that is written in your eyes! It is a privilege to serve so distinguished a guest."

His obsequious whispers sickened me, and I gathered my resources inwardly to meet the assault he was making on my will.

When I refused not only to drink, but to taste a mouthful of the unique lunch provided, a sudden vicious anger flickered in his pale, cold eyes.

"I regret that my poor fare does not please you, sir," he said, his voice like the sound of dry leaves blown before a storm.

"It is better for me that I do not eat," I answered curtly, my eyes meeting his as our wills clashed.

For a long, terrible minute the world dropped from under me: existence narrowed down to those malicious eyes which held mine. I held on with all the desperation of a drowning man tossing in a dark sea of icy waters—torn, buffeted, despairing, at the mercy of incalculable power.

With hideous, intolerable effort I met the attack, and by the mercy of Allah I won at last; for the creature turned from me and smoothly covered his defeat by attending very solicitously to Birkett's needs.

I relaxed, sick and trembling with the price of victory.

I had fought many strange battles in my life: for in the East, the Unknown is a force to be recognized, not laughed at and despised as in the West. Yet of all my encounters, this one was the deadliest, this evil, smiling Thing the strongest I had known in any land or place.

Must Birkett's strength go to feed this insatiable foe who battened on the race of men?

I shuddered as I watched him sitting there, eating, drinking, laughing with his host; his whole mind bent on the pleasure of the moment, his will relaxed, his brain asleep; while the creature at his side served him with hateful, smiling ease, watching with cool, complacent eye as his victim let down his barriers one by one.

In his annoyance with my behavior, Birkett prolonged the meal as long as possible, ignoring me as I sat smoking and watching our host as intently as he watched us.

Anxiously I wondered what the next move in this horrible cat-and-mouse game would be; but it was not until Birkett rose from the table at last that the enemy showed his hand.

"It's a pity you can't be here on Friday night, sir! You'd be just the one to appreciate it. One of our

gala nights—in fact the best night in the year at the *Seven Green Men.* You'd have a meal worth remembering that night. But I'm afraid they wouldn't let you in on it."

"Why not?" demanded Birkett, instantly aggressive.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but you see it's a very special night indeed. There's a very select society in this neighborhood; I don't suppose you've so much as heard of it: *The Sons of Enoch.*"

"Never heard of 'em." Birkett's tone implied that had they been worth knowing, he *would* have heard of them. "Who are they? Those seven green chaps you keep in the grounds—eh?"

A cold light flashed in the innkeeper's eyes; and my own heart stood still, for the flippant remark had been nearer the truth than Birkett guessed.

"It's a society that was founded centuries ago, sir. Started in Germany in a little place on the Rhine, run by some old monks. There are members in every country in the world now. This one in America is the last one to be formed, but it's going strong, sir, very strong!"

"Then why the devil haven't I been told of it before?"

"Why should you know of all the hole-and-corner clubs that exist?" I interposed. The innkeeper was probing Birkett's weakest part. How well—oh, how truly the smiling, smooth-spoken devil had summed up my poor blundering friend!

"It'll be a society run for the Great Unwashed!" I continued. "You'd be a laughing-stock in the neighborhood if it got out that you were mixed up with scum of that sort!"

"There is much that your great travels have not taught you, sir," answered the innkeeper, his sibilant speech savage as a snake's hiss. "The members of this club are those who stand so high, that as I said, I fear they would not consent to admit you even once to their company."

"Damn it all!" Birkett interrupted irritably. "I'd like to know any fellows out here who refuse to meet *me.* And who are you, curse you, to judge who can be members or not?"

Our host bowed, and I caught the mocking smile on his thin lips, as the fish rose so readily to his bait.

I poured ridicule on the proposition and did all I could to turn Birkett aside, but to no avail. Opposition, as always, goaded him to incredible heights of obstinacy; and now, half drunk and wholly in the hands of that subtle devil who measured him so accurately, the poor fellow fairly galloped into the trap set for him.

It ended with a promise on our host's part to do all in his power to persuade the *Sons of Enoch* to receive Birkett and perhaps make him a member of their ancient society.

"Friday night then, sir! About 11 o'clock the meeting will start, and there's a midnight supper to follow. Of course I'll do my best for you, but I doubt if you'll be allowed to join."

"Don't worry," was Birkett's valedictory remark. "I'll become one of the *Sons of Enoch* on Friday, or I'll hound your rotten society out of existence. You'll see, my jolly old innkeeper, you'll see!"

And as we left the grounds, passing once more the Seven Green Men, their leaves rustled with a dry crackle that was the counterpart of the inkeeper's hateful, whispering voice.

5

Our drive homeward was at first distinctly unpleasant. Birkett chose to take my behavior as a personal insult, and, being at a quarrelsome stage of his intoxication, he kept up a muttered commentary: ". . . insulting a decent old bird like that . . . best lunch ever had . . . damned if I won't . . . Sons of Enoch

. . . what's going to stop me . . . be a Son of Enoch . . . damned interfering fellow, d'Abre! . . ."

He insisted on driving himself, and took such a roundabout way that it was two hours later when we saw New Haven in the distance. Birkett was sober by this time and rather ashamed of his treatment of a guest. He insisted on pulling up at another little roadhouse, *The Brown Owl,* run by a New England farmer he wanted me to meet.

"You'll like the old chap, d'Abre!" he assured me, eager to make amends for his lapse. "He's a great old man, and can put up a decent meal. Come on, you must be starving."

I was thankful to make the acquaintance of both old Paxton and his fried chicken . . . and Birkett's restored geniality made me hopeful that after all he might not prove obdurate about repeating his visit to the *Seven Green Men.*

Old Paxton sat with us later on his porch, and gradually the talk veered round to our late excursion. The old farmer's face changed to a mask of horror.

"The *Seven Green Men! Seven,* did you say? My God! . . . oh, my God!"

My pulses leaped at the loathing and fear in his voice; and Birkett brought his tilted chair down on the floor with a crash. Staring hard at Paxton, he said aggressively, "That's what I said! *Seven!* It's a perfectly good number; lots of people think it's lucky."

But the farmer was blind and deaf to everything—his mind gripped by some paralyzing thought.

"Seven of them now . . . *seven!* And no one believed what I told 'em! Poor soul, whoever it is! Seven now . . . Seven Green Men in that accursed garden!"

He was so overcome that he just sat there, saying the same things over and over again.

Suddenly, however, he got to his feet and hobbled stiffly across the veranda, beckoning us to follow. He led us down the steps to his peach orchard behind the house, and pointed to a figure shambling about among the trees.

"See him . . . see him!" Paxton's voice was hoarse and shaken. "That's my only son, all that's left of him."

The awkward figure drew nearer, approaching us at a loping run, and Birkett and I instinctively drew back. It was an imbecile, a slobbering, revolting wreck of humanity with squinting eyes and loose mouth, and a big, heavy frame on which the massive head rolled sickeningly.

He fell at Paxton's feet, and the old man's shaking hand patted the rough head pressed against his knees.

"My only son, sirs!"

We were horribly abashed and afraid to look at old Paxton's working features.

"He was the *Sixth* Green Man . . . and may the Lord have mercy on his soul!"

The poor afflicted creature shambled off, and we went back to the house in silence. Awkwardly avoiding the farmer's eye, Birkett paid the reckoning and started for his car, when Paxton laid a detaining hand on his arm.

"I see you don't believe me, sir! No one will believe! If they had done so, that house would be burnt to the ground, and those trees . . . those trees—those green devils with it! It's *they* steal the soul out of a man, and leave him like my son!"

"Yes," I answered. "I understand what you mean."

Paxton peered with tear-dimmed eyes into my face.

"You understand! Then I tell you they're still at their fiend's game! My son was the *Sixth* . . . the *Sixth* of those Green Men! Now there are *Seven!* They're still at it!"

6

"How about staying on here and having another swim when the moon rises?" I said, apparently absorbed in making my old briar pipe draw properly, but in reality waiting with overwhelming anxiety for Birkett's reply.

It was Friday evening, and no word had passed between us during the week of the Seven Green Men, or Birkett's decision about tonight.

He was sitting there on the rocks at my side, his big body stretched out in the sun in lazy enjoyment, his half-closed eyes fixed on the blue outline of Long Island on the opposite horizon.

"Well, how about it?" I repeated, after a long silence.

He rolled over and regarded me mockingly.

"Anxious nurse skilfully tries to divert her charge from his naughty little plan! No use, d'Abre; I've made up my mind about tonight, and *nothing's* going to stop me."

I bit savagely on my pipe-stem, and frowned at an offending gull which wheeled to and fro over the lapping water at our feet.

As easily could a six-months-old baby digest and assimilate raw meat as could Birkett's intellect grasp anything save the obvious; nevertheless I was impelled to make another attempt to break down the ramparts of his self-sufficient obstinacy.

But I failed, of course. The world of thought and imagination and intuition was unknown and therefore non-existent to him. The idea of any form of life, not classified and labeled, not belonging to the animal or vegetable kingdom, was simply a joke to him.

And old Paxton's outbursts he dismissed as lightly as the rest of my arguments.

"My dear chap, everyone knows the poor old fellow's half mad himself with trouble. The boy was a wild harum-scarum creature always in mischief and difficulties. No doubt he *did* go to a midnight supper at the *Seven Green Men*. But what's that got to do with it? You might as well say if you got sunstroke, for instance, that old Paxton's fried chicken caused it!"

7

"You don't mean to say that you're coming too?" asked Birkett, when, about 10:30 that night, I followed him out of doors to his waiting car.

"But of course!" I answered lightly. "You don't put me down as a coward as well as a believer in fairy-tales, do you?"

"You're a sport anyhow, d'Abre!" he said warmly. "And I'm very glad you're coming to see for yourself what one of our midnight joints is like. It'll be a new experience for you."

"And for you," I said under my breath, as he started the engine and passed out from his dim-perfumed garden to the dusty white highroad beyond.

A full moon sailed serenely among silvery banks of cloud above us; and in the quiet night river and valley, rocky hillside and dense forest had the sharp, strange outlines of a woodcut.

All too soon we reached the warning sign, "Dangerous Road," and passed from a silver, sleeping earth to the stagnant gloom of that tunnel-like highway.

But hateful as it was, I could have wished that road would never end, rather than bring us, as inevitably it did, to that ominous green-and-black sign of our destination.

The sound of a deep rhythmic chant greeted us as we went up the steps, and we saw that the roadhouse was lit from end to end. Not with the mellow, welcoming radiance of lamp or candle, but with strange

quivering fires of blue and green, which flickered to and fro in mad haste past every window of the inn.

"Some illumination!" remarked Birkett. "Looks like the real thing to me! Do you hear the *Sons of Enoch* practising their nursery rimes? Coming, boys!" he roared cheerfully. "I'll join in the chorus!"

As for myself, I could only stare at the moonlit garden in horror, for my worst fears were realized, and I knew just how much I had dreaded this moment when I saw that the seven tall trees—those sinister devil-trees—were gone!

Then I turned, to see the huge bulk of the innkeeper close behind us, his head thrown back in silent laughter, his eyes smoldering fires above the ugly, cavernous mouth.

Birkett turned too, at my exclamation, and drew his heavy eyebrows together in a frown.

"What the devil do you mean by creeping up to us like that?" he demanded angrily.

Still laughing, the innkeeper came forward and put his hand familiarly on my friend's arm. "By the Black Goat of Zarem," he muttered, "you are come in a good hour. The *Sons of Enoch* wait to receive you—I myself have seen to it—and tonight you shall both learn the high mysteries of their ancient order!"

"Look here, my fine fellow," said Birkett, "what the deuce do you mean by crowing so loud? I've got to *meet* these nigger minstrels of yours before I decide to join them."

From the house came a great rolling burst of song, a tremendous chant with an earth-shaking rhythm that was like the shock of battle. The ground rocked beneath us; gathering clouds shut out the face of the watchful moon; a sudden fury of wind shook the massed trees about the house and grounds until they moaned and hissed like lost souls, tossing their crests in impotent agony.

In the lull which followed, Birkett's voice came to me, low and strangely subdued: "You're right, d'Abre! This place is unhealthful. Let's quit." And he moved back toward the steps.

But the creature at our side laughed again and raised his hand. Instantly the grounds were full of shifting lights, moving about us—hemming us in, revealing dim outlines of swollen, monstrous bodies, and bloated features which thrust forward sickeningly to gloat and peer at Birkett and me.

The former's shuddering disgust brought them closer and closer upon us, and I whispered hastily, "Face them! Face them! Stamp on them if you can, they only advance as you retreat!"

Our host's pale, smiling face darkened as he saw our resolution, and a wave of his hand reduced the garden to empty darkness once more.

"So!" he hissed. "I regret that my efforts to amuse you are not appreciated. If I had thought you a coward"—turning to Birkett—"I would not have suggested that you come tonight. The *Sons of Enoch* have no room for a coward in their midst!"

"Coward!" Birkett's voice rose to a bellow at the insult, and in reaction from his horror. "Why, you grinning white-faced ape! Say that again and I'll smash you until you're uglier than your filthy friends here. No more of your conjuring tricks! Get on to the house and show me these precious Sons of yours!"

I put my hand on his arm, but the blind anger to which the innkeeper had purposely roused him made him incapable of thought or reason, and he shook me off angrily.

Poor Birkett! Ignorant, undisciplined, and entirely at the mercy of his appetites and emotions—what chance had he in his fatuous immaturity against our enemy? I followed him despairingly. His last chance of

escape was gone if he entered that house of his own free will.

"The trees are gone!" I said in a loud voice, pulling Birkett back, and pointing. "Ask him where the trees are gone!"

But as I spoke, the outlines of the *Seven Green Men* rose quivering in the dimness of the garden. Unsubstantial, unreal, mere shadows cast by the magic of the Master who walked by our side, they stood there again in their stiff, silent ranks!

"What the deuce are you talking about?" growled Birkett. "Come on! I'll see this thing through now, if I'm hanged for it."

I caught the quick malice of the innkeeper's glance, and shivered. Birkett was a lump of dough for this fiend's molding, and my blood ran cold at the thought of the ordeal to come.

8

OVER the threshold of the house! . . . and with one step we passed the last barrier between ourselves and the unseen.

No familiar walls stood around us, no roof above us. We were in the vast outer darkness which knows neither time nor space.

I drew an Arab knife from its sheath—a blade sharpened on the sacred stone of the Kaaba, and more potent here than all the weapons in an arsenal.

Birkett took my wrists in his big grasp and pointed vehemently with his other hand. In any other place I could have smiled at his bewilderment; now, I could only wish with intense bitterness that his intellect equaled his obstinacy. Even now he discredited his higher instincts; even here he was trying to measure the vast spaces of eternity with his little foot-rule of earthbound dimensions.

Our host stood before us—smiling, urbane as ever; and, at his side, the *Seven Green Men* towered, bareheaded and armor-clad, confronting us in ominous silence, their eyes devouring hells of sick desire!

"My brothers!" At the whispered word, Birkett stiffened at my side and his grip on my arm tightened.

"My brothers, the *Sons of Enoch,* wait to receive you to their fellowship. You shall be initiated as they have been. You shall share their secrets, their sufferings, their toil. You have come here of your own free will . . . now you shall know no will but mine. Your existence shall be my existence! Your being my being! Your strength my strength! What is the Word?"

The *Seven Green Men* turned toward him.

"The Word is thy Will, Master of Life and Death!"

"Receive, then, the baptism of the initiate!" came the whispered command.

Birkett made a stiff step forward, but I restrained him with frantic hands.

"No! No!" I cried hoarsely. "Resist . . . resist him."

He smiled vacantly at me, then turned his glazed eyes in the direction of the whispering voice again.

"No faith defends you . . . no knowledge guides you . . . no wisdom inspires you. *Son of Enoch,* receive your baptism!"

I drew my dagger and flung myself in front of Birkett as he brushed hastily past me and advanced toward the smiling Master. But the *Seven Green Men* ringed us in, stretching out stiff arms in a wide circle, machinelike, obedient to the hissing commands of their superior.

I leapt forward, and with a cutting slash of my knife got free and strode up to the devil who smiled, and smiled, and smiled!

"Power is mine!" I said, steadying my voice with hideous effort. "I know you . . . I name you . . . Gaffarel!"

9

IN THE gray chill of dawn I stood once more before the house of the *Seven Green Men.*

The dark woods waited silent and watchful, and the house itself was shuttered, and barred, and silent too.

I looked around wildly as thought and memory returned. Birkett . . . Birkett, where was he?

Then I saw the trees! The devil-trees, stiff, grotesque and menacing in their armor, silhouetted against the white, blank face of the roadhouse behind.

The *Seven Green Men!*

Seven . . . no . . . there were eight men now! I counted them! My voice broke with a cry as I counted and recounted those frightful trees.

Eight!

As I stood there sobbing the words . . . eight . . . eight . . . eight! over and over, with terror mounting in my brain, the narrow door of the inn opened slowly, and a figure shambled out and down the path toward me.

A big, heavy figure that mouthed and gibbered at me as it came, pouring out a stream of meaningless words until it reached my feet, where it collapsed in the long dewy grass.

It was Birkett—Nicholas Birkett! I recognized the horrible travesty of my friend at last, and crept away from him into the forest, for I was very sick.

THE sign was freshly painted as we passed it coming out, much later, for it was long before I could bring myself to touch Birkett, and take him out to the waiting car.

The sign was freshly painted as we passed . . . and the livid green words ran:

"THE EIGHT GREEN MEN."

NIGHT TREES

By FRANK BELKNAP LONG, JR.

I thought I saw them writhing in the dawn
  On cold, black hills—the gnarled and twisted ghosts
  Of Titan cedars and the sapling hosts
That stood so starkly naked and forlorn.

Poor stricken things that bore the forms of men
  And forms of beasts; great gorgons unreclaimed
By childhood's gracious fancy. Did I then
  Declare that they had been forever maimed?

Tall aspens writhing like beheaded snakes,
  And cypresses with lean, distorted necks,
And stunted hemlocks in the riven brakes
  That fringed the garments of the oaken wrecks.

Oh did I stand and curse them, one by one
That were so lovely once beneath the sun?

The Tale of a Gigantic Bacterium

THE TENANT

By AUGUST W. DERLETH

THE cab that brought him had long since vanished over the crest of the distant hill, and still Gerald Paxton stood and stared at the low English country home that rambled away into a charming rock garden at the left. The door of the residence was partly open, suggesting perhaps that he was expected. Through the French window he could see Michael Sanbury busily writing at the center table. From the rock garden at the left came Michael's right-hand man, whose name, Paxton remembered, was Jenkins.

"Hallo, there. You're Mr. Paxton, I suppose. Mr. Sanbury's been looking for you. You're to go right in, sir."

"All right, Jenkins."

"You'd better go through the French windows, sir; I think Mr. Sanbury's in his library."

Mr. Paxton made his way slowly up the flagstone walk to the open windows. Jenkins looked meditatively at the trowel in his right hand, and began to meander casually back to the rock garden. For a moment Paxton hesitated before the windows; then he walked into the room.

He had progressed almost to the spot where Michael Sanbury sat, surrounded by sheaves of paper on all sides, before he was noticed.

"My dear Gerald! What a surprize!"

"Glad to see you again, Michael."

"Sit down, anywhere.'

"I thought I'd have to run down here and see why you've secluded yourself."

"I'm taking life easy now, Gerald."

"This isn't by any means your place, is it?"

"It is. Surprized, aren't you? No more than I was when I first learned of it."

"How did you get it?"

"I inherited it by my grandfather's will. You should have seen it when I got here; I could have palmed it off as an antique ruin. With the help of Jenkins I've made a fair place out of it."

"I noticed. Especially your rock garden."

"Yes, I insisted on the rock garden; I had plenty of facilities, in the way of rocks."

"How old do you think the building is?"

"I haven't the remotest idea. I can remember it vaguely during my grandfather's day."

"I can't recall ever having heard of your grandfather."

"I don't think you did. He disappeared from this house when I was very young. His disappearance, by the way, gave rise to a peculiar rumor to the effect that this old house has an unseen tenant. You see, the conditions of my grandfather's disappearance are rather odd, to put it mildly. He vanished from the house while every possible exit from both house and grounds was guarded—not, of course, by hired guards, but by circumstantial guards. Nothing was ever heard of him."

"A curious story. It reminds me very much of the disappearance of

old Roxy Camburn, the pseudo-scientist."

"It *should* remind you; Roxy Camburn was my grandfather, my mother's father."

"My dear Gerald!"

"He wasn't, if you happen to remember, just exactly a reputable character."

"I do recollect that there were ugly rumors current about him. Nothing was ever proved, so far as I remember."

"No, nothing was ever proved; that's true. His name was connected with the disappearance of several small children from the countryside."

"It was about the time of the agitation about vampires, wasn't it?"

"Yes, I believe it was."

Michael Sanbury rose slowly and yawned. "Come, let me show you to your room. I think Jenkins is out in the garden."

"Yes. I saw him there when I came; in fact, he directed me to your library."

The two men moved slowly from the room.

It was not exactly the kind of house Gerald Paxton had pictured to himself. Not that he was disappointed; he wasn't. There was a curious air of dejection about the place, in spite of its beautiful surroundings and its perfectly charming appearance. Michael had given him a grand old room, which had once been the study of his eccentric grandfather. It had been refurnished in excellent harmony, with a curiously feminine attention to detail. The two large windows, which overlooked a long stretch of rolling country, were hung with chintz and what looked to be muslin, but proved to be muslinette. Close to the window-seats stood a transformation chair, and to the right of this a smoking-stand, with place for books or magazines, or whatever one wished to put there. The bed was swollen with softness, and it looked very much as if the puffy coverings would envelop him if he slept therein. But he did sleep in the bed, and a particularly refreshing sleep it was, so he told his host the following morning.

"I'm glad," said Michael, "that you liked it. I thought that perhaps you might be disturbed in the night. You weren't, were you?"

"I don't think I ever slept better. I heard nothing to disturb me. As a rule, I sleep quite soundly. What made you ask?"

"Jenkins has a most annoying habit of puttering about at all hours. He's disturbed me once or twice, and I've reprimanded him, but it doesn't seem to bother him. He knows I wouldn't discharge him, for he's priceless as a man of all work."

"He's been with you for years, hasn't he?"

"Twelve years. My sister has tried to get him from me; she's too conscious of his worth to please me."

The two men rose and strolled out into the rock garden.

"There's one thing," Michael resumed, "that I have against Jenkins: he believes that silly rumor of an unseen tenant in the house."

"How odd! He seems a sensible man."

"He is, Gerald; too sensible. Nothing I can say will change his mind in the least. He's bound that there's something else in this house; he doesn't say somebody, but something. That's why he putters about so much during the night; he's determined to discover the tenant."

"How droll! Can't you suggest anything that might explain it—his attitude, I mean?"

"I've been thinking, Gerald. And I wondered whether my grandfather has anything to do with this. You know, Jenkins worked under him two years. Odd as it is, he refuses to speak to me about him."

"Well, your Jenkins is proving somewhat of a mystery."

"He *is* a mystery; twelve years with him, and I know no more of him now than I ever did. At first he objected violently to my rejuvenating this place, but when he saw that I was fully as determined to do so as he was bound that I should not, he gave in without another word. Nor has he said anything since."

"I wonder what he'd tell me if I asked him?"

"Why not try asking him?"

"I think I shall; it won't do any harm."

Two days later the inimitable Jenkins was being persistently annoyed by Gerald Paxton, who had taken it upon himself to fathom the mystery. The two men stood in the rock garden, Jenkins sedulously trimming a rose tree, Paxton standing near, watching him.

"Is it true, then, that the old man kidnaped these children for his experiments?"

"Utter rot, sir; the old man wasn't half so bad as he was painted. He wouldn't harm a living thing if he could help it. Sometimes, though, he couldn't."

"What do you mean?"

"He used to tell me that he needed living things to feed his pet."

"What sort of pet did he have?"

"There you have me, sir. Just between you and me, sir, the old man was a bit daft. I never did see that pet, but I did hear some queer things at night. All sorts of noises there were, and when I asked the old man about them, he used to laugh and say that he had been feeding his pet."

Jenkins stopped and glanced nervously toward the house. He bent toward Paxton.

"It's odd, sir, but I've heard these noises since the old man died, while young Mr. Sanbury's been in the house."

"What sort of noises were there?"

"Different kinds, and they're hard to describe. One, though, I heard all the time—a kind of wet, sloshy noise, as if someone were throwing a soaked sponge on the floor."

"Did you ever search the house, Jenkins?"

"I've searched that house so often that I could find my way through it blindfolded. I've gotten up more than once at night, and I've gone from garret to cellar, and all the good it's done me is to make Mr. Sanbury suspicious."

"Where do these noises seem to come from?"

"It's hard to say, but I think it's the cellar, or below the cellar if that be possible."

Michael Sanbury emerged from between the French windows and started for the rock garden. Jenkins bent again to the rose tree. Paxton moved to pick a rose.

"I say, Jenkins; suppose we search the house tomorrow while Mr. Sanbury's gone to the village?"

"He'll ask you to go with him."

"I'll be indisposed."

"Very well, sir."

Michael Sanbury came up. He took Paxton by the arm and moved with him to the farther extremity of the rock garden.

"Have you discovered anything?" he asked.

For a moment Paxton hesitated. Then he spoke.

"No. Singularly enough, he doesn't want to speak about him."

"Just what I thought."

"By the way, Michael, what sort of thing did your grandfather go in for?"

"As far as I remember it was bacteria culture."

"Oh! yes; it was he who wrote the paper that called down the wrath of Sir Crichton Crookes and his school."

"I don't remember."

"Yes, undoubtedly it was he."

It was already late in the afternoon of the following day, when Jenkins and Paxton ended their methodical search in the cellar of Michael Sanbury's home. They had discovered nothing, and Paxton was quite ready to regard with amusement his credulous belief in Jenkins. Jenkins, firm in his belief, stood looking at the rear wall of the cellar with narrowed eyes, his head cocked a bit to one side, his thin lips pressed firmly together.

"It occurs to me, sir, that the cellar was larger than this when I worked under Mr. Camburn."

"That wall does look newer than the other three. Suppose you tap it?"

Jenkins was already at the wall, pounding upon it. It gave back a hollow sound that seemed to echo from within.

"Well, there's a hollow space behind it, all right. What are we going to do about it?"

"I don't think there's much danger of Mr. Sanbury's return for some time yet. I think we'd be safe in removing one or two stones to give us some idea of what's behind this wall. We can always put them back again."

"Very well, then; let's get at it."

Jenkins went upstairs and returned in a few minutes with a crowbar and a sledge-hammer. The two men attacked the wall. In five minutes a hole large enough for a man to crawl through had been made in the wall; a few seconds later the men were standing in the space disclosed, regarding a large, deep pit in the earth.

"Flash your light into that pit, Jenkins."

A stream of light lit up the almost perpendicular walls of the pit and the black slimy bottom.

"Mud!" from Jenkins.

"It looks like black jelly."

"Ugh!"

"That's what has been causing your noises, Jenkins. Bubbles rising through that slime, or perhaps suction."

"Perhaps it is, sir. It's quite possible, at any rate."

"Listen. There's someone walking about above. Mr. Sanbury's returned. I'll go up to him. You put the stones back; we'll wall it up later."

Gerald Paxton ran up the stone steps and down the hall into the library. Michael Sanbury stood by the table, drawing off his gloves. He turned.

"I've sold my novel, Gerald. To Sadler's for five hundred pounds."

"Congratulations, Michael. I haven't been exactly idle all day. In fact Jenkins and I have discovered the mysterious tenant of this place."

"No!"

"It was nothing but a mud-bottomed pit walled off from the cellar. Jenkins had been hearing noises, caused by suction in the slime and mud; that's why he believed in the tenant story."

"Well, that's a relief. And, by the way, I inquired about my grandfather down at the village. It appears he is generally hated there. One old man, formerly a university professor, pointed out to me that the man was unquestionably insane. He says my grandfather entertained the belief that bacteria could be bred, and could be grown into an entity which would grow in proportion to its food. My grandfather is said to have believed that live food advanced the growth of a bacterium entity, and when some children disappeared in the locality (they were probably carried off by gipsies), it was thought that my insane ancestor had kidnaped them. Some action was actually taken against him, but nothing was ever proved."

"That helps to clear up our little mystery."

"It wasn't so deep after all, was it?"

The strokes of a clock somewhere in the house came clearly to Gerald Paxton as he lay half awake, half asleep in his bed. He heard an owl call somewhere outside the window, and a moment later another. His watch ticked sharply on his arm.

The night was warm, and Gerald Paxton had lain for some time feigning sleep. It was already after midnight. Dimly to his ears came a soft sound, as of a soaked sponge being thrown to the floor. He listened. The sound increased in intensity; it seemed to be coming toward him. He started, and strove in his dream state to think of the day's discovery, of the suction of the mud in the pit, when suddenly he heard a new sound—a soft padding, as if someone were walking down the hall. Immediately alert, he thought of Jenkins, and of his nocturnal investigations. He wondered whether Michael heard. It dawned upon him at last that the soft spongy sound was annoyingly close, and he half rose in his bed, and strained his ears to listen. Suddenly, clearly, came a shot, and immediately after a sound as of a great mass of jelly sliding down the stone steps into the cellar.

Gerald Paxton arose, put on his slippers and snatched his dressing-gown. He switched on the light in the hall and ran to Michael's room. Michael, pale, wide-eyed, came from his room with a flashlight in one hand and a revolver in the other.

"It was Jenkins," said Michael, pointing down the hall to Jenkins' room. Through the open door they could see Jenkins' empty bed in the glare of the electric light.

"But what on earth is the man doing at this hour of the night?"

"I'm used to hearing him about—but shooting! It's beyond me. I didn't even know the man had a weapon."

"He seems to have gone into the cellar."

"I guess there's nothing for us to do but follow him."

Michael leading, they moved off down the hall, and on into the dark cellar. Michael flashed his light about until finally it came to rest upon an ominous aperture in the rear wall, and a cluster of scattered stones below it. The darkness of the pit seemed to come out to meet the light. Without warning Paxton snatched the light from Sanbury and ran forward through the aperture into the enclosure. On the ground, almost at the edge of the pit, lay a revolver. The barrel of the weapon was coated with a slimy, jellylike substance, clearly like to the mud at the bottom of the pit! Paxton stared at it with unseeing eyes. His flashlight wavered; it illuminated for a moment the mud of the pit, from the undisturbed surface of which came a loud sucking noise.

Blindly, Gerald Paxton ran from the pit into the arms of Michael, who had come to the broken wall.

"My God! My God! Cement, Michael; we must have cement to fix this wall!"

"But Jenkins? Where is Jenkins?"

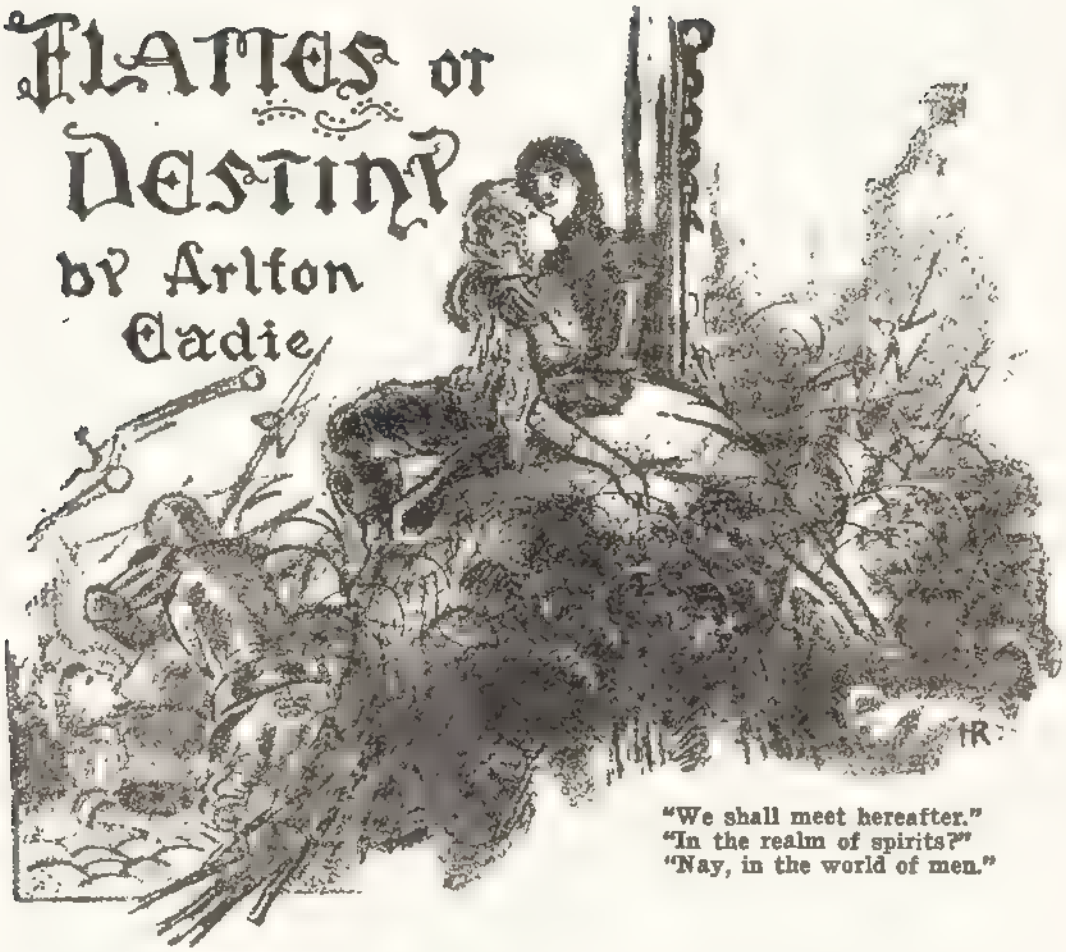
"We must leave this place at once, Michael."

"Without——?"

"Yes, yes; at once. My God! The tenant got Jenkins!"

Flames of Destiny

by Arlton Cadie



"We shall meet hereafter."
"In the realm of spirits?"
"Nay, in the world of men."

"A GENTLEMAN to see you, sir," announced the man who combined the offices of waiter-boots-potman at the tiny inn where I had taken up my quarters for the night. At the same time he handed me a card.

"Adrian Dane."

For a full minute I stared at the name in surprize, racking my brain in an effort to remember where I had heard it last. Then, in a flash, remembrance came.

"Please show Mr. Dane up to this room," I told the man.

Left alone, I stood wondering what strange chance had brought my old fellow-student again across my path. Although he had not belonged to my immediate set at Oxford, I had formed with him one of those haphazard friendships which one never seems to keep up later. I remembered that we had both gone down in the same year; afterward I heard he had entered the Indian civil service. After that we had just drifted apart. He had been a shy, retiring sort of fellow, studying erratically and keeping very much to himself. On the rare occasions when I had visited his rooms his talk had been mainly on hypnotism, telepathy, and similar occult subjects. A queer fellow, undoubtedly, yet somehow likable.

In appearance he had never been what one might call robust, but when I caught sight of his face as he entered the room I uttered an ex-

clamation of concern. He was deadly pale and there were large dark shadows around his eyes. Yet his movements were brisk enough, and the grip of his hand, though naturally cold (it was freezing hard outside), was firm and hearty.

Immediately our first commonplace greetings were over I asked how on earth he had discovered me in that out-of-the-way inn; for it was by the merest accident that I had visited Winchester at all. But he turned the matter off with what I thought at the time to be a somewhat feeble jest.

"My dear Hadleigh," he said with a slow, languid smile, "you forget I have to sustain my reputation as a dabbler in the Black Art! I simply projected my spirit into space—and here I am!"

Something of the irritation I felt at this piece of pointless foolery must have shown itself in my face, for he rose quickly and laid his thin white hand on my shoulder as he went on seriously: "Believe me, my friend, I did not come here without deep reason."

Both his action and tone of voice surprized me. He seemed like a man who wanted to speak frankly, yet dared not.

"Well," I returned with a forced laugh, "the Black Art, as you call it, does not seem to have improved your health. You look like a ghost! Have you been ill?"

Again that wan smile flitted across his features.

"Yes, I have been ill, very ill. But at present I am well. I have no pain or suffering—now."

I murmured the usual congratulations, and then ensued a rather embarrassing silence, during which he sat pensive and motionless, his eyes fixed on the glowing embers of the fire. For want of some better subject of conversation, I plunged into an account of my own doings since quitting college. In the midst of my recital he rose abruptly to his feet.

"Yes, Hadleigh, I am quite aware of all that you're about to tell me," he said. "Don't ask me where I got my information, for I have no time to go into details. You can, if you like, attribute my knowledge to the Black Art. As a matter of fact I have a rather important engagement to fulfil."

He glanced toward the clock as he spoke. Following the direction of his eyes, I noted it was just seven minutes past 10.

"You're surely not returning to London tonight?" I exclaimed.

"I fear I must," he answered. "The appointment I have tonight is one that can not be put off. Therefore I must come to the point at once." He fixed his unnaturally bright eyes full upon mine as he asked, "Do you believe in the transmigration of souls?"

For a moment I was struck breathless by the unexpectedness of the question. Then I laughed. "I always imagined that the tenets of Pythagoras went out of fashion with trunk-hose and farthingales!" But, as I noted the strained gravity of his expression, I added: "Do you mean to say that you have sought me out just to ask me that?"

"Yes," came the answer in a tone of quiet intentness.

"Then I may as well set your mind at rest by telling you that I regard the whole theory as a parcel of utter rot!"

He nodded his head slowly.

"I thought that would be your answer, Hadleigh. But I wish to ask you another question. Are you willing to submit yourself to a"—he paused for a moment as though seeking a fitting word—"a demonstration that will cause you to change your opinion?"

"A demonstration?" I echoed. "Where?"

"Here in this room—at this moment!" he answered. Then, seeing that I hesitated, he went on with feverish eagerness: "I assure you that this is no idle whim on my part."

Now, I rather prided myself on possessing an open and unbiased mind. My attitude toward matters occult had been that of a self-confessed agnostic, unwilling to concede a point without proof, yet always open to examine such evidence as might be forthcoming. The suggestion of Adrian Dane roused my curiosity considerably; moreover, there was an indefinable something in his manner that told me some grave and vital purpose lay behind his seemingly fantastic proposal. I was not long in making up my mind.

"Go ahead," I said cheerfully.

Our preparations for the séance were few and simple. In response to his request, I lay down on the couch facing the latticed window looking onto the street. He turned down the gas until the room was in semi-darkness; then took from his pocket a small disk of dull copper and held it before my eyes.

"Fix your attention on this, Hadleigh," he commanded rather than asked. "Banish from your mind all thoughts and surmises. Give your will—your soul—your self—unreservedly into my keeping!"

I endeavored to obey. Minutes passed, but except that the disk grew vague and indistinct before my vacant gaze, nothing happened. I was just on the point of telling him that I must be a bad subject, when with the suddenness of thought he snatched the disk away and substituted his own face. In a moment everything was changed. I seemed to feel my will being dragged from my possession like some tangible thing. His eyes seemed to dominate and command me, holding me in a vise from which there was no escape. Then they began to grow larger, although this was probably merely the effect of his advancing his face toward my own. Larger and larger they grew, until at last they appeared like the double entrance to some vast cavern gaping wide, dark, unfathomable before me.

Presently a quaint fancy seemed to seize upon my confused brain. What if I were to enter and explore the labyrinth of his mind? No sooner was the thought conceived than I seemed (for I must have been unconscious by this time) to put it into execution. I stepped boldly through the gap. . . .

Darkness, opaque and impenetrable, encompassed me on every side as I stumbled onward. Whether I progressed yards or miles I cannot tell, but all at once the ground seemed to give way beneath my feet and I fell, not as an earthly body falls, but swaying from side to side lightly, as though I were composed of some ethereal substance as light as the air itself. Down, down, and ever down I rushed, until it seemed as though I had delved deep into the maw of Eternity, where a thousand years is as the ticking of a clock, and Time does not exist. Then upon my mental vision there burst a line of glowing writing, as though traced by a pencil of living fire:

The Eighth Day of October, 1645.

And I seemed to know that for me the ponderous gates of Time had rolled back, and that I, a phantom with the feelings of a man, was about to step forth into the world of long ago.

Then the writing faded, and I slept. . . .

* * * * * * * *

The sustained roll of drums in the Market Square outside roused me from my slumber. Instinctively I recognized it as the signal for the mustering of my troop of gallant

lads who trailed their pikes under the banner of Lord-General Cromwell.

After a few minutes of groping about in the dark, I found my high buff boots, still harsh with the mud of the trenches we had dug when we stormed the town, and drew them on. Then I adjusted the steel corselet which guarded back and breast, and tightened the buckles with deft, accustomed fingers. The wide belt which carried my straight, cup-hilted rapier was quickly slipped over my right shoulder and held in position by the silken sash which I knotted round my body, at the point where the armor gave place to the long-skirted doublet of stout buff leather. Then, swinging on the broad-brimmed plumed hat and snatching up a pair of leather gloves with high, protecting gauntlets, I made my way down the narrow stairs and out into the street.

Above the twin towers of the great cathedral the bleak night sky was just beginning to pale with the first gray streaks of dawn. Hoarfrost glittered on the uneven cobbles of the road and on the gables and cross-timbers of the ancient Market House. Twenty paces from the inn door my troop was drawn up in double rank, their sixteen-foot pikes—which had ere now brought to naught many a dashing charge of the Royalist horse—sloped at an angle before them. As I approached, a sharp command rang out, and five-score steel-shod butts smote the ground with a clang as they came to attention.

I gave the customary return; then, taking my place at the head, again raised my hilt to the level of my eyes, this time saluting the colors. This done, I lowered my point and waited for what was to happen next.

Anon the ruffle of drums and screaming of pipes sounded on the frosty air, and round the corner of the Square there swung three companies of Pride's Musketeers, there colonel riding at their head. With colors flying and matches burning, they passed within half a pistol-shot of our ranks, and many a lowering scowl and muttered curse followed them as they marched by.

Although both were fighting under the same standard, the feud between those who tossed a pike and those who fired a musket was a long-standing and bitter one. The pikemen bitterly resented the higher pay and privileges granted to the wielders of the newer and more effective weapon. This was so at the best of times, but recent events had so fanned the smoldering hatred that every moment it threatened to burst forth into flame. When, two days since, the city of Winchester had fallen before our onslaught, a brawl had arisen between the two regiments over the sharing of the booty. Although according to the Articles of War the plundering of a besieged town or fortress was strictly forbidden on pain of death, the practise was in reality covertly winked at by those in command. For one thing, the prospect of spoil was calculated to give an added zest to the assault; for another, it afforded the soldiery an opportunity of making up those arrears of pay which were all too frequently long overdue. But this time the Lord-General had taken a firm hand in the matter (more, methinks, from rage at seeing his troops flying at each other's throats than from any over-nice scruples in the matter). He had proclaimed, by beat of drum, that all the burghers of the city should be left secure in their possessions, and in addition had hanged a round dozen of the plunderers, choosing the culprits only from the ranks of the pikemen, which fact so roused the feelings of their comrades that they were now on the brink of mutiny. It needed but a spark to light the blaze of open revolt, and that spark, though we

knew it not, was now on the point of being struck.

The music ceased and a sudden hush fell upon the Market Square, now lined on all four sides by troops of the various regiments. And as we waited the first pale beams of the wintry sun broke through the clouds, for the first time illuminating the Square and revealing the grim import of the objects which stood in the center—an iron stake set upright in the ground, with a heap of fagots piled about its base.

Then a trumpet blared out, and the cordons of soldiery, who had hitherto held back the eager townsfolk, were withdrawn, allowing the mob to enter and occupy the space between the houses and the troops. Another trumpet-blast, and as if by magic the ribald jests of the crowd were stilled, and over each face there came a look of dreadful anticipation. From the mouth of the narrow street leading to the castle there emerged a sad procession. First walked two halberdiers of the Town Guard; then a dignitary clad in a furred gown and carrying in his hand a parchment scroll with many dangling seals; following him was a man in a close-fitting suit of stained crimson leather, whose features were completely hidden by a mask; two more halberdiers followed, then a great shout burst from the crowd as they caught sight of the white-robed figure of a girl.

"The White Witch! The White Witch! Burn the sorceress—to the stake with the accursed witch!"

Appalled by the sudden menacing roar, the girl shrank back, raising her chained hands and pressing them to her heart, but a blow from the halberd of one of the guards sent her staggering forward again. At the sight, a wave of hot blood seemed to surge to my head and a throbbing sounded in my ears like the hoofbeats of a troop of galloping horses.

Now, heaven be my witness that I make no pretensions to be regarded as a Paladin. A soldier's trade is at best a rough and brutal one. Life is liable to be short; death is ever grinning hungrily at his elbows; he must take his pleasures when and where he can—and women and wine were never far away from the baggage-train even of that self-styled Army of the Elect! Yet I can swear that every good impulse in me leaped to life as I looked into the pale, pure face of that witch condemned to die.

With firm and even tread she advanced toward the hideous apparatus of death. An involuntary murmur of admiration rose from our ranks as she passed. Men of iron courage themselves, they were not slow to recognize and admire the same virtue in another.

"Witch or no—the wench is a rare plucked 'un!" I heard my sergeant mutter into his grizzled beard.

An ominous and expectant silence fell upon the packed Market Place as the sheriff stepped forward, unrolled the parchment scroll, and began to read what was evidently the sentence of the court which had condemned her. The rigmarole was so bedecked with ponderous legal jargon and high-sounding Latin that it was well-nigh impossible to grasp its full meaning. But the frequent repetitions of the words "bewitching by diabolical arts the said Master Nicholas Rowe," "damnable sorceries," "contrary to the law and the Scriptures," together with such scraps of gossip as I had previously picked up, enabled me to make a shrewd guess of its general drift.

The reading finished, the sheriff stepped back and made a sign to the man in crimson. The next moment the girl was being bound to the stake by means of a long iron chain wound several times about her body. This done, one the halberdiers came forward and placed something in her

arms. It was a tiny black kitten—her familiar fiend according to the finding of the learned fools who had condemned her. She took it in her arms almost mechanically and gently stroked its soft, sleek fur. The doomed mite ceased its frightened mewing and nestled close to her, settling itself to sleep.

Now, three years of constant campaigning is likely to blunt the edge of a man's softer feelings. It was no new thing for me to see men slain in hot blood—aye, and in cold blood, too! I had seen Rupert's Horse ride among the broken ranks of fleeing, unarmed foot, cutting them down at their leisure until their arms grew weary with the slaughter. But the sight of that poor wench fondling the kitten so unconcernedly in the face of a lingering and agonizing death made me turn sick and faint. The feeling passed in a moment and in its place there came a hot and furious anger.

Scarcely realizing what I did, I strode forward and saluted the Lord-General with my drawn sword. In the hushed pause which followed I could feel the thousands of eyes bent upon me from all sides.

"Lord Cromwell," I cried aloud, "I crave a few minutes' speech with ye ere this maid dies!"

The man raised himself in his stirrups and turned upon me his cold gray eyes.

"How now?" he cried harshly. "Captain Hadleigh, what means it that ye break rank without leave? Back to your troop, sir, and consider yourself under arrest. Tomorrow I will hold speech with ye—over a drumhead!"

"Tomorrow will be too late. So, if it please your lordship, I'll e'en say my say now. It concerns this poor innocent maid."

Before Cromwell could make answer, a tall, thin man dressed in a suit of rusty black, with broad white cuffs and neckbands, interposed.

"Innocent maid, forsooth!" he drawled in a harsh nasal tone. "She is a witch! She hath been accused and condemned as by law required, and her wretched life is forfeit. Saith not the Scriptures, 'Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live'?"

I made him a low, ironical bow.

"Granted, most reverend sir," I answered. "But, unless my memory plays me false, they also contain another text, which runs, 'Let him who is without sin cast the first stone'!"

It was but a clumsy parry and I knew it; but it served its turn, for a loud guffaw of laughter rose from round about. Nothing is so fickle as a mob; its moods leap from murder to mirth in the twinkling of an eye. I had made them laugh—that was something in my favor. But I must arouse other emotions—pity and justice—if I were to save the girl.

"By what token dost thou presume to declare that she is a witch?" I demanded. "Upon whose evidence was she condemned? I will tell ye, men of Winchester! The only testimony against her comes from a man who is a liar, a trickster, and—in spite of his hoary locks—an abandoned profligate to boot!"

The man in black held up his skinny hands.

"A profligate? Godly Master Rowe—the richest man in Winchester—darest thou dub him profligate?"

"Rich he may be," I returned hotly, for the man's manner angered me. "But it is not from his ledgers and money-bags that I ask ye to seek the truth. Ask rather of those whom his lying, wheedling tongue has brought to ruin. Ask of the tavern idlers; ask of those poor wenches who follow the camp! Then shall ye know of what manner of man is this worthy, upright, wealthy Master Rowe!"

No longer was I the center of interest now; every eye was turned on Master Nicholas Rowe as he stood

shouting and gesticulating on the balcony whence he had intended to view that merry morning's work. He was angrily demanding my immediate arrest and punishment. To my mind, however, there was another emotion visible on his blotched, unhealthy features—it was fear that caused his tongue to stammer and his obese limbs to shake.

Still, he was a man of importance in the city; a man whom, at this hour, Cromwell could ill afford to thwart. I saw the Lord-General bend forward and whisper a few words in the ear of his Colonel of Musketeers, whereupon Pride strode straight toward me, rasping out his sword as he came. At the same moment I heard the clash of steel behind me as my troop came to the ready without word of command.

I smiled to myself as I saw Colonel Pride come to an irresolute halt. Hadleigh and his flaunting pikes were not wholly unknown in the New Army. My rascals loved me to a man, and I knew that, if the matter in hand came to be settled by push of pike, matters would not be all on one side. I ran toward the pile of fagots; then turned toward them.

"Pikes! Pikes!" I roared. "Rally round your captain! Are ye soldiers or wench-slayers? Pikes!"

Scarcely had the words left my lips before my daredevils had advanced and, with a clatter and a cheer, formed themselves about the fatal pile.

I felt my heart glow as I looked upon that steady ring of glittering points. Never did my rascals look so fine as on that wintry morn when making that forlorn stand to save an unknown, condemned wench. But there was little time to be spent in admiration. Cromwell, his face working like a tortured devil's, was spurring madly to the rear of the Musketeers, shouting orders and pointing his drawn blade toward our little band. But short shrift could we expect from him. The old feud between the pikes and muskets would soon be wiped out with running blood.

"Musketeers . . . make ready your pieces!" came the order. "Prime! . . . Blow your matches. . . ."

With one bound I had gained the summit of the pile; another moment, and my sword had proved its temper by severing the links of the chain. Then I caught up the girl and stood with her in my arms.

What joyous madness seized upon me at that moment I know not. But as I clasped her slender body to my steel-clad breast a throb of defiant elation passed through me. The mob, Cromwell, the leveled muskets, were alike forgotten as I pressed my lips to hers.

For a breath her pallid features grew paler still; then a deep rosy flush overspread them. I feared I had affronted her, but in the same instant that I cursed myself beneath my breath for a graceless boor, she raised her face to mine and returned the kiss. No words passed—none were needed—but if ever soul flashed toward soul in a blaze of love, ours did at that moment.

But even in that moment of ecstatic joy I did not forget the tenets of my soldier's trade. I must wait for the volley which was sure to come; then, with the girl thrown across my shoulder, I must endeavor to escape under cover of the smoke of the discharge. It was a desperate plan; yet there could be no other. It might succeed; if not——

"Musketeers . . . give fire!"

As the thunder of the volley sent the echoes bounding from the four corners of the Square I endeavored to fling myself, with the girl, behind the shelter of the pile of fagots. But even as I leapt, my breastplate rang out like a gong, and a pang, like that of a red-hot iron passing through my body, told me that one of Pride's bul-

lets had found its mark. Aye, and more than one! For the figure in my arms had quivered pitifully, and now a large and ever-spreading crimson stain appeared on the bosom of her dress.

"I am hit!" she whispered weakly. "Hold me—everything is growing dark."

It did not need a second glance into the beautiful face to know that she had received her death-wound. I'd seen enough of warfare to recognize that ominous grayish hue. And I myself was in no better plight as I swayed limply against the tar-soaked pile. A dull roaring sounded in my ears, as dimly, as though through a blood-red mist, I saw the shadowy ranks of Pride's Musketeers fighting vainly with their clubbed muskets against the line of remorselessly advancing pikes. Then a crackling sound, nearer at hand, drew my attention. Gathering my strength, I raised myself on my elbows—and realized the terrible truth.

The pile, on which we both lay, had been fired!

Whether the mischief had been done deliberately, or by a flaming wad from one of the muskets, I can not say; but the fact remained that flames were now licking in and out among the straw at the base of the pile. I tried to raise her in my arms to bear her hence, but my strength was ebbing fast.

She must have guessed my intention, for her eyes opened and looked into mine as she said faintly, "Let be. What boots it whether we die here or later? At least we are together."

Together! Desperate though our strait was, the word thrilled me. Strange though our meeting and short the seconds before us, I knew full well that her love for me was deeper than the ocean—more enduring than the mountains. And as I looked upon her beauty, my heart rebelled against the irony of destiny.

"I have gained your love but to lose you forever!" I groaned.

She shook her head slightly and a strange smile hovered about her lips.

"The end is not yet," she whispered. "Though we die, and our ashes be mingled together on a felon's pyre, our love will not perish. We shall meet hereafter."

"In the realm of spirits?" I asked, amazed at her words.

"Nay, in the world of men."

Wild as her words seemed, I believed them.

"Give me a sign—a token," I cried, "that I may know it be thou, in very sooth, when again we meet."

She lifted her hand toward a slender silver chain around her neck and drew from her bosom a small silver cross.

"Break it in twain." Her voice was so weak that I could scarce catch the words. "Keep one half—until—until——"

Her voice ceased, and I knew that the end had come. Thank God that she had passed ere the flames had reached her!

I clasped her limp form closer to my breast, and on her cold lips imprinted one last kiss.

"Till we meet, my love!" I cried, as with a crackle and a roar the flames surged round about the living and the dead.

Then the shouts, the scattered shots and clash of steel died away as I sank forward—started—and awoke. . . .

I was lying on the sofa in my room in the old Winchester inn. The morning sunlight was streaming through the window. The fire was a heap of gray ashes. Adrian Dane had disappeared.

I arose shakily. So vivid had been the vision that my brow still felt clammy with the horror of it. But, after all, it had been but a dream, and I laughed aloud in my relief. Then the laugh froze on my lips as I looked down at the thing I still clutched in my right hand.

It was a broken silver cross, blackened by fire!

* * * * * * *

THE following day I transacted the business which had brought me to Winchester and then returned to town. Such was the impression left on my mind by my uncanny experience that I would have called on Adrian Dane at once; but, strangely enough, he had omitted to furnish me with his address. I had a feeling, however, that I should hear from him before long, and I was not mistaken.

One afternoon, on returning to my rooms, I was met at the door by my man, who informed me that a lady was waiting to see me.

"Who is she, Jephson?" I asked as I removed my hat and overcoat.

"I don't know, sir. She didn't give any name, only said her business was important."

The moment I opened the door I stood rooted to the spot with sheer astonishment. Before me, though now dressed in modern costume, was the living image of the witch-girl of Winchester! There were the same delicate features, the same oval face, the same passionate, far-seeing eyes that had last looked into mine through the glare of the blazing pyre.

Mastering my surprize as best I could, I came forward and uttered a commonplace greeting.

"Please forgive my intruding upon you without a previous introduction," she said, "but I came at the earnest request of my brother, Mr. Adrian Dane, who was, I think, an old friend of yours. I should have called some days since, but I have only just succeeded in discovering your address."

"Surely your brother could have furnished you with that?" I asked in mild surprize.

"My brother is dead," she said in a low voice; and for the first time I noticed that she was dressed in deep mourning.

Remembering how ill he had looked when I saw him last, I was hardly surprized at the news.

"Before he died he asked me to give these papers into your hands," she went on, taking a sealed packet from her hand-bag. "He said they would explain something you would wish to know."

She handed me the envelope and rose to go.

"Please do not go yet," I said quickly. "I think it just possible that the papers may be of interest to you, too."

"I already know their contents," she answered. "They are documents which have been handed down from generation to generation. They refer to the trial and execution of a member of our family, many years ago."

I broke the seal and rapidly scanned the documents. First came the records of the moot-court held at Winchester on September the twenty-fifth, 1645, seting forth the information, "laid by Master Nicholas Rowe, of this city, against one Althea Dane, who by divers supernatural and damnable arts hath"—I tossed this document, with its rigmarole of absurdities, to one side and took up the next. This was the warrant of execution, dated the eighth day of October. The third paper was a mere scrawl, penned in a trembling hand. It bore the superscription of "The Confession of Master Nicholas Rowe, given under the persuasion of Hab Jenkins, Sergeant of the Pike Company of Captain Hadleigh, lately slain in the riot in the Market Square." If this sergeant was the same grim-visaged veteran of my dream, I could imagine that his "persuasion" was not likely to have been over-tender!

As I read the shaky lines, the whole pitiful story became clear. The rejected advances of the old libertine; the simulated cramps and agonies of the "bewitchment"; the false accusation against the helpless girl; the

(Continued on page 432)

Folks Used to Believe

by ALVIN F. HARLOW

The Vampire

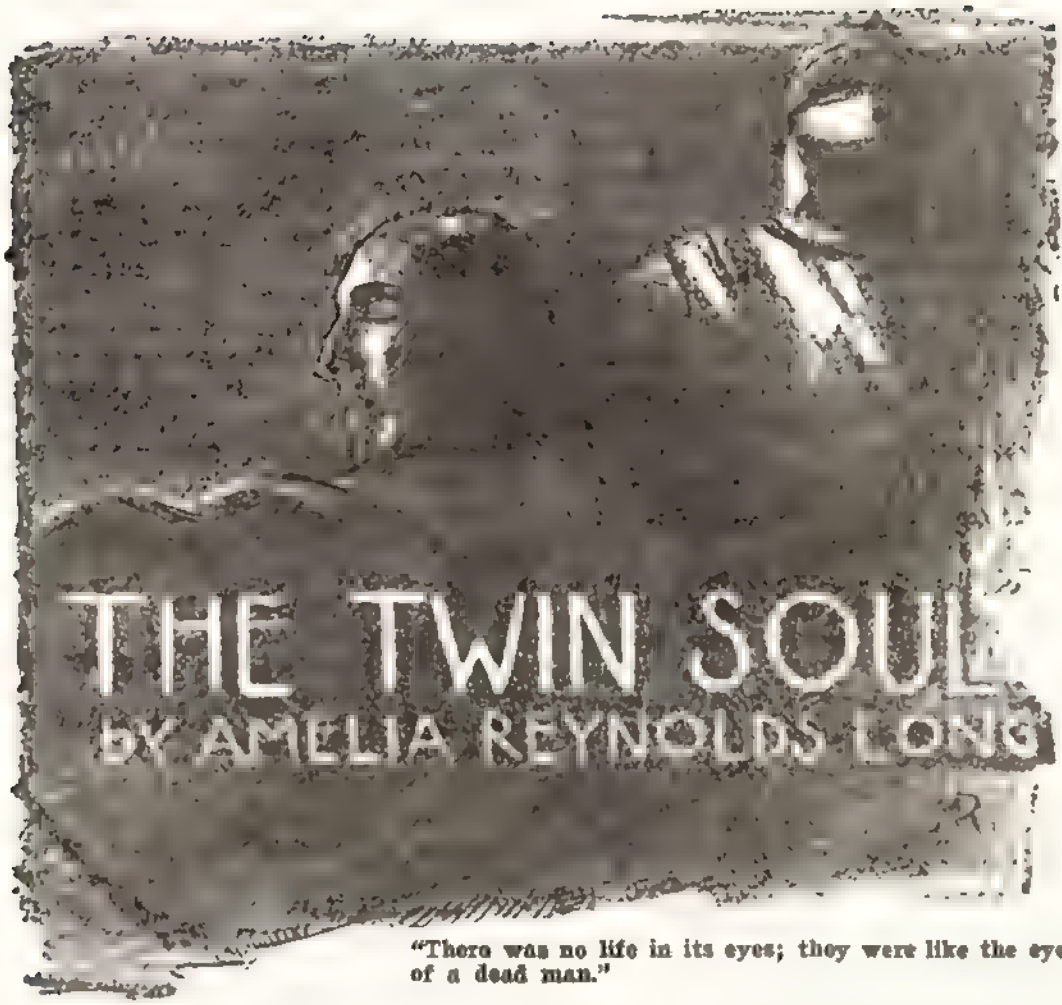
IN South America there are blood-sucking bats which have been known to attack horses and cattle and even man in his sleep. They are called vampires because their taste is supposed to resemble that of those hideous, demoniac creatures of Slavic fable—a belief in which still persists in many regions of eastern and southeastern Europe.

One theory is that the soul of a living person, usually a sorcerer, leaves the body while asleep, and in the form of a bit of straw or fluff of down, slips through keyholes, attacks sleeping victims and sucks their blood. If the sleeper should waken in time to clutch this tiny soul-embodiment, he may injure or kill the vampire thus. But the most general form of the belief is that the vampire is a dead wizard, witch, werewolf, suicide or one cursed by his parents or the church. Even an innocent man might become a vampire after death if he had fallen victim to another vampire, or if a cat or bird crossed his dead body before burial. In some countries such a cat was at once killed. Such bodies do not decay in the grave; if you open the coffin, you are apt to find the body turned on its side, the eyes staring, cheeks flushed, skin firm, hair and nails still growing.

At night the vampire rises and goes forth to suck the blood of living persons, who thereupon pine, waste away and die. He can only be laid to rest by a stake (in Russia it must be of aspen) driven through his heart. Only in 1825 was this custom abolished by law in England. In some neighborhoods the supposed vampire's corpse is dug up and beheaded.

Some claim that the vampire feeds only on children's blood. Sometimes when the vampire first awakes in the grave after death, he begins to gnaw his own hands or feet and chew his shroud, causing his kindred to sicken and die. Many vampires devour only the hearts of their victims: others steal the hearts out of their victims' bodies and substitute therefor the heart of a cock or rabbit. The stolen heart they expose over a magic fire, which creates hopeless love-longings in the victim. This is where we get our romantic phrases about stealing or losing the heart when in love.

In modern Bulgaria a magician armed with a saint's picture is sometimes sent to lure a vampire into a bottle in which is some of the filthy food which a vampire loves; the bottle is then quickly corked and thrown into the fire, and the vampire dies. In some neighborhoods a man with heavy eyebrows meeting over his nose, "as if his soul were taking flight like a butterfly to enter some dead body," was liable to be suspected of being either a vampire or a werewolf.



"There was no life in its eyes; they were like the eyes of a dead man."

MIDNIGHT!

Somewhere in the dark labyrinth of the lower halls of Sullivan Towers, the ancestral home of my friend, Sir Guy Sullivan, an unseen clock told off twelve melancholy strokes in lifeless monotony. From where I lay in bed beside my friend, I counted them mechanically, my mind for the moment diverted from the wind and rain that was lashing the world outside. As the last stroke was told off, there was a thud, as of some sinister, heavy thing falling into place.

A strange uneasiness crept over me. What was it about this gloomy, slowly decaying old place that had drawn Sir Guy back to it after an absence of twelve years?

My friend's low breathing reassured me, for I experienced a sensation of acute revulsion at the thought of being left alone anywhere in that house; a touch of terror, arising from the premonition that while supposedly alone, I yet would not be alone; that an indefinable Something lurked in the shadows.

My thoughts turned to the mysterious doctor who had leased the Towers during Guy's absence, and who was still occupying a part of the old place. *Who* was he? *What* was he? We knew only that his name was Niles Murnane, that he was something of

a recluse, and that he was conducting certain experiments with which we were in no way to interfere during our stay at the Towers. We had not seen the doctor upon our arrival. There had met us only Ferguson, Sir Guy's man, who had come on ahead with our luggage.

I turned over and finally fell into a light slumber, from which I suddenly found myself wide awake. Some change had taken place in the room. For several minutes I lay perfectly still, trying to determine what that change could be.

Presently I became aware that Guy's gentle snoring had ceased, and that he was breathing very softly, although quite regularly and without effort. This surprized me, for during all the years of our friendship I had never known him to breathe in that fashion while sleeping. Through the darkness I strained my senses in his direction. Then, with startling suddenness, I realized the change that had taken place in the room. *The man beside me was not Sir Guy Sullivan!*

What were my exact emotions at that moment I do not remember. They seem to have been a wild jumble, in the midst of which that one fact stood out clear and undeniable. It was too dark for me to see him, and yet I knew perfectly well that the man beside me was not my friend!

Cautiously I arose! If this man was not Guy Sullivan, I would at least learn who he was, and also, perhaps, what had become of Guy. My groping hand found the matches. With feverish impatience I lit the candle, guarded the flame with my hand, and crept stealthily toward the bed. Whom—or what—would I see there?

Bending low, yet taking care not to awaken him, I let the dim candlelight fall upon the face of the sleeper. What I was expecting I do not know; but what I beheld was the well-known features of Guy himself!

It took me several minutes to realize that it was indeed he. But there was the unmistakable, slightly aquiline curve of the nose, the dark, straight line of the brow, even the little scar upon the left cheek. Dazedly I set down the candle and, neglecting to extinguish it, got back into bed. There was no possible denying the familiar features of my friend, and yet only a moment before I would have been willing to swear that the man beside me was not Sir Guy Sullivan.

I slept no more that night. During the long hours intervening until dawn, I lay upon the bed fully awake, my eyes riveted upon the face of the man beside me. I had an uncanny feeling that if I removed my gaze even for an instant, Guy would vanish and that stranger return—return and refuse to be gone when again I looked for my friend.

At last (I think it must have been around 4 o'clock, for the top part of the windows was beginning to turn gray), I fell into an uneasy but deep slumber, from which Guy awakened me several hours later.

When we descended the dark old mahogany staircase, we found Ferguson awaiting us.

"Dr. Murnane sends you his regards, and invites you to breakfast with him in the east room," he said.

This was wholly unexpected, for the doctor had utterly ignored us upon our arrival the night before.

The doctor's apartment had its east side composed almost entirely of glass, so that the sun flooded it with dazzling brilliance. So bright was this glare that upon first entering, I was entirely blinded to the presence of another man who was standing over by the dark hearth. It was only when he spoke that I became aware of him.

"Sir Guy? And Mr. Hammond? Good morning."

"Ah! Dr. Murnane, I believe?" Guy stepped forward, extending his hand. "Awfully good of you to put up with us. Hope we aren't inconveniencing you."

"Not in the least." He motioned us to our places at the table. "In fact, I shall be glad of your company. You slept well last night, I trust?"

We both replied that we had; but I fear that my answer did not carry conviction, for the doctor turned his deep-set gray eyes searchingly upon me.

"You are a light sleeper, Mr. Hammond?" he inquired.

"No, not especially," I replied in some surprize. "Why?"

"Merely an idle question." He shrugged slightly, dismissing the subject. But I had an odd feeling that he had known of my long hours of sleeplessness.

"They tell me that you keep no servants," observed Sir Guy presently. "Isn't it a bit inconvenient and lonely in this big place?"

"Inconvenient, no," replied Dr. Murnane; "lonely, yes, at times. But then I have—my experimental work."

He paused ever so slightly before the three last words; and I received the vivid impression that he had intended saying something else, but had changed it at the last minute.

"May I inquire what lines your experiments follow?" asked Guy, more through a desire to make conversation than because he really wanted the knowledge.

"Certainly. And yet," Dr. Murnane smiled thoughtfully, "I fear I shall have difficulty in explaining so that you will know just what I mean. You might call it, perhaps, organic creation."

"Microbes and that sort of thing?" I asked, recalling having read somewhere how cellular forms of life could be produced artificially in a laboratory.

"No." He shook his head slowly. "I am what you might call a metaphysical surgeon."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Guy. "What a profession! One might say you operated upon the soul, eh?"

"Precisely." Dr. Murnane seemed pleased with the phrase. "That sums up my profession pretty well, Sir Guy."

LATER in the morning I was alone in the library—Guy had gone to his room to write some letters—when Ferguson entered.

"Mr. Hammond," he began, after making sure that the door was tightly closed behind him, "may I speak to you a moment, sir?"

"Of course," I answered, wondering what his secretive manner could mean. "What is it, Ferguson?"

"It's about this house, sir. There's something wrong here."

"Wrong?" I repeated. "I don't understand."

"Neither do I, sir," replied Ferguson, "and that makes it all the worse. Last night, for instance. I'd be willing to swear that Dr. Murnane never saw his bed. His eyes this morning had the look of a man who had not slept."

"Still," I protested, "there is nothing alarming about that. Men of science, I believe, often stay up all night to work upon their experiments."

"Yes, I know," he rejoined, "but this is different. I have the feeling, somehow, that it is some unholy thing he is experimenting with. There are certain things, you know, that men are the worse for finding out. Did you notice at breakfast when Sir Guy asked if he wasn't lonely here, he said, 'But then I have—my experimental work.'? He sort of stopped

like in the middle of the sentence. You *did* notice it, I think, sir?"

"Yes," I admitted, "I did. But what significance do you attach to it?"

"None, exactly," he replied. "But —well, Mr. Hammond, I had the feeling that instead of 'experimental work' he was going to say a person's name."

"What?" I exclaimed. "What do you mean, Ferguson?"

"Just that, sir," he answered. "I could have taken my oath that he had meant to say a person's name, but for some reason changed his mind. Then, there's the Presence."

"The what?"

"Excuse me, sir. I had not meant to say that. But it's as if there's something here besides ourselves; not a person or an animal; just a Presence."

I was silent, remembering my experience of the previous night. Was there, then, more to this affair than appeared upon the surface? Ferguson was an even-headed fellow, not given to hallucinations.

"Ferguson," I began, but got no farther. From somewhere in the interior of the house rang out a weird, long-drawn-out shriek that seemed to come nearer and nearer along the dark hallways until it entered the very room where we were, and for several seconds rolled like a poisonous vapor about the ceiling! Then even more abruptly than it had started, it ceased, leaving in its place an ominous silence!

Ferguson and I stared at each other dumbly. At last he spoke.

"My God, sir!" he whispered hoarsely. "What was that?"

Together we started on a run in the direction from which the sound had seemed to come. In the main hallway we encountered Sir Guy.

"What has happened?" he demanded excitedly. "I thought I heard a scream."

"So did we," I replied. "It seemed to come from the west side of the house."

"That would be in the armory," he said. "Come."

With Ferguson and me at his heels, he started off in that direction. But we had gone only a short distance when he all but collided with Dr. Murnane, who was hurrying from the rear of the house. His face was ashen, and he was greatly excited.

"Gentlemen, please go back," he entreated. "You must not come this way. It is not safe."

"But we thought we heard a scream," I began. "Is anyone hurt?"

"No, no. Everything is all right," he assured us hastily. "Go back, please. You must not come any farther." Slipping by us, he passed into the next room, and we heard the click of a bolt as the door closed behind him.

We stared at one another. There was nothing to do but go back, so we slowly returned to the library. When we were all within its walls, Guy confronted us. "Now tell me, each of you, what you heard," he requested.

"I heard a scream," I replied. "At first I thought it was human, but now I'm not so sure."

"And I heard the same, Sir Guy," said Ferguson. "Mr. Hammond and I were both in this room when it started."

"Did it seem human or animal to you, Ferguson?"

"I couldn't say, sir. I was too startled to notice."

Guy turned to me. "You're sure you thought it was human at first, Lucas?" he questioned.

"At first, yes," I said, "but now I can't be so positive. But you

heard it yourself. What do you think?"

"I was in my room with the door shut," he answered, "and so I did not hear it distinctly. But my impression was that it was a bestial howl issuing from human lungs, if such a thing is possible."

"Heavens!" I gasped, but said no more, for at that moment Dr. Murnane appeared in the doorway.

"I hope you have not been greatly alarmed, gentlemen," he said courteously. "An experiment in my laboratory miscarried, forming gas which escaped through a small valve. It was that which caused the sound you heard."

I have noticed that Englishmen are, as a class, generally inclined to avoid what we Americans term a situation; and I had never found Sir Guy to be an exception to this rule. Now, however, he rose admirably to the occasion.

"What makes you think, Dr. Murnane, that we only *heard* something?" he asked.

"Mr. Hammond said as much," answered the doctor. "You—you could not have done other than hear?"

"Not see, for example?" suggested Sir Guy cannily.

At his words the doctor's face became positively ghastly.

"Merciful heavens, man!" he cried. "You don't mean—you saw——?"

"No," said Guy quietly, "we did not see, we merely heard. But, now, doctor, perhaps you will tell us *what* we heard."

"I believe I have already done so."

Guy smiled. "Come now," he said. "I do not believe that story, nor do you expect me to. Let us not underrate each other's intelligence to such a degree. That scream issued from the lips of a human being."

The doctor walked to the fireplace, and for several seconds stood pinching his chin between thumb and forefinger. At last he spoke.

"No," he said slowly, "you are mistaken. That scream did not issue from the lips of a human being, nor was it the cry of an animal. In my profession, gentlemen, there are some things that can not be explained to a layman."

I saw Ferguson's face go white, and his knees start to tremble. "You mean, sir——" he began involuntarily.

Dr. Murnane smiled. " 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy,' " he quoted. "But I mean nothing supernatural, Ferguson. To those who understand, there is no supernatural. But," turning back to us, "I thought we had agreed, gentlemen, that you were not to interfere in my experiments."

"We had," replied Guy promptly. "And I intend to keep my word so long as your experiments do not run contrary to the laws of humanity."

The doctor laughed softly. "So that's it; is it?" he murmured. "Well, you need have no fears along those lines, my dear sir. I am doing no harm to man, beast, or—anything else."

I HAVE been told that it is possible for the few words and actions of others to react upon our subconscious selves, and so force us to act according to their suggestions. Whether or not this was true in my case I do not know, but I can say positively that it was only after this conversation betwen Guy and Dr. Murnane that I became conscious of what Ferguson termed the Presence.

It was just before tea-time that I first felt it. I was in the library again, idly browsing through a book that had caught my fancy. Guy, I knew, was lying half asleep upon a couch in the part of the room at my back. It had turned out to be one

of those unreliable March days that begin fair and end sullen, and had, toward its close, threatened a continuation of yesterday's rain. Earlier in the afternoon, Ferguson had laid a fire on the hearth, and now its orange glow mingled weirdly with the waning daylight.

But of these things I was only dimly aware as I sat reading. In the same way I realized that the house had settled into a deep, almost heavy silence, but my conscious being was in no way affected by—and indeed scarcely noticed—these facts.

I am very sensitive to surrounding conditions; and now I became aware that someone was moving in the room behind me. I had heard no sound, but nevertheless I was keenly conscious of the proximity of another intelligence. Automatically I decided that Guy had awakened, and was walking about—I would naturally hear no footsteps because of the heavy carpet. So, without giving it another thought, I let the matter slip from my mind.

But presently it was brought back by the feeling that Guy had moved to my chair, and was standing beside me. Thinking he wished to say something to me, I lowered my book, and waited for him to speak. Then when several seconds had passed and he did not do so, I looked up. My gaze met empty air!

I am not superstitious, so I told myself that I had imagined the whole thing, and turned back to my book. But I had barely resumed my reading when the strange obsession returned, even more strongly than before. And now I was conscious of another fact. As in the case of the previous night, the man in the room with me—if indeed it was a man—was not Sir Guy!

The realization came so suddenly that for an instant I was paralyzed. My reason kept telling my instinct that I was mistaken, that no one could be in that room but Sir Guy and myself. And yet I was as positive of the presence of another as I had been of the stranger the night before; as positive and as aware of its impossibility.

For several seconds I sat tense, waiting and listening. The Presence —I started slightly as I realized that in my mind I had used Ferguson's term for the inexplicable something he had felt—was quite close to me; so close, indeed, that I could have reached out my hand and touched it, if such things could be touched.

The next instant came a new experience. The thing had taken hold of me; had gripped my shoulder! But when I looked I could see no fingers upon my coat, nor could I feel the physical pressure of a human hand! And yet I knew that something had touched me; felt it as one feels the steady gaze of a hypnotist controlling his muscles while still there is no actual contact between the two.

I felt the hair at the back of my neck begin to rise, while a clammy perspiration broke out all over my body. In panic I struggled to my feet and faced about.

"Now," I cried, "whoever or whatever you are, speak and tell me what you want."

For several seconds the room seemed surcharged with electricity, as if some vague thing were trying to assume definite shape. I stood listening, more than half expecting that from somewhere out of the dusk a voice would come, answering my challenge. But nothing happened, and soon the atmosphere began to clear again.

Dazed, I staggered toward the middle of the room, dimly feeling that there was something I must do. Then my glance rested upon Sir Guy, still lying upon the couch, and I ran to his side.

"Guy," I called, "wake up. Something strange has just occurred."

He did not move. I caught him by the shoulder, and shook him gently. "Wake up, Guy," I commanded. "Something has happened."

Still he made no response, and growing alarmed, I bent closer. His inertia was not sleep, but unconsciousness!

With legs that almost refused to support my weight I ran to the door and called loudly for Dr. Murnane. In a moment or so he appeared, coming from the general direction of the armory.

"Doctor," I cried, "something has happened to Sir Guy. I found him lying unconscious upon a couch."

Without a word Murnane pushed past me, and knelt beside the still, white figure. After a cursory examination, he looked up.

"There is a bottle of smelling salts upon the mantel in the east room," he said. "Get it."

Mechanically I obeyed, finding the bottle without difficulty, and returned with it as fast as I could. When I reentered the library, I found that the doctor had lowered Guy's head, and was chafing his wrists vigorously. With a muttered word of thanks he took the bottle from me, and uncorking it, held it to his patient's nostrils.

"What is it?" I asked anxiously; "a case of faint?"

"Acts more like stupor," he answered. "In any case, it's good you called me. Ah," as Guy showed signs of coming round, "that's better! Hammond, there's a bottle of rum in that cabinet. Pour him a drink."

I did as he requested, making the dose a stiff one. Under the fiery influence of the liquor, Guy opened his eyes and looked up at us.

"Where am I?" he muttered thickly.

"You're in the library, old man," I said, greatly relieved at the sound of his voice. "You had a bad turn or something. Feeling better now?"

"Yes, I'm quite all right again." He tried to sit up, but Dr. Murnane laid a restraining hand upon him.

"You had better lie still a while longer, Sir Guy," he advised. "But if you feel quite able to do so, suppose you tell us, if you can, what happened to you."

"I don't know if I can—exactly." Guy passed a hand slowly across his brow, as though trying to recall a hazy memory. "I was lying here upon the couch half asleep. Lucas—Mr. Hammond—was sitting over by the fire, reading. All of a sudden I became aware of a slight dizziness, and a sinking sensation crept over me. I had a feeling that my personality—my ego, if you know what I mean—was being slowly submerged, and I began to fight against it with all my might. Then (this is the strange part) it seemed as if I was two people; or rather that my brain was being controlled by two powers at once; my own mind and another were struggling to gain the mastery. I can't explain it, Dr. Murnane, but I could feel it working. I tried to call to Mr. Hammond, but consciousness left me, and I knew nothing more until I spoke just now."

For a long time the doctor sat gazing thoughtfully into space. At last he asked: "Have you ever had an attack like this before?"

"No," said Guy. "I'm sure I never had."

"Nor anything similar? In fact, any kind of attack at all?"

"No—only my losses of memory, if you could count them."

"Ah!" The doctor regarded him intently. "What were they like?"

"Only extreme cases of absent-mindedness. I used to get attacks when I had no memory of my actions for hours at a time."

" 'Used to get'? Have you not experienced any recently?'

"Not for almost a year. They began when I was about fourteen years old."

For several minutes Dr. Murnane studied the man before him. Presently he said, "Sir Guy, the experience which you have just undergone is a very strange one, and interests me excedingly. Would you object to submitting to a litle hypnotic test which I have in mind? I give you my word of honor it will not harm you."

"What do you want to do to him?" I asked before Sir Guy could answer.

"Merely learn, if I can, what were his experiences while he was unconscious. As you perhaps know, it is a scientific belief that the ego of a man never really sleeps, but may operate in another sphere, leaving no recollection of its activities upon the conscious mind. Have I your consent to make this experiment, Sir Guy?"

Guy hesitated an instant, then nodded. "Go ahead," he directed. "If you can discover what happened to me, I want you to do so."

APPREHENSIVELY I watched the doctor as with deft, sure touch he massaged his patient's forehead, the while he spoke to him in low, soothing tones. Soon Guy closed his eyes, and his muscles relaxed.

"A very easy subject. I think our little experiment is going to prove a sucess." Dr. Murnane had looked up at me as he spoke. Now he let his gaze return to the face of the man he had just hypnotized.

"Why, what—how?" he cried the next instant. "Surely I had him under my control!"

Guy, who had a moment before lain inertly under the power of the hypnotist, was now looking up at us with large, slightly puzzled eyes. The doctor leaned forward and repeated his performance, and again Guy gave way before his power, although this time not so readily.

"Now, Guy Sullivan," Dr. Murnane spoke with a clear, concise enunciation, "tell us what happened to you while you were unconscious."

Guy's answer came promptly, although without a particle of meaning.

"He overcame me. He—he put me aside."

"What in thunder——" I gasped.

"Who put you aside?" demanded the doctor, without the slightest show of emotion.

"I don't know what to call him, but he is here."

"What does he mean?" I asked in a whisper.

"I haven't the slightest idea," replied the doctor. "But let us go on with the experiment." He turned back to Sir Guy. "Tell us what you did," he repeated.

The two other answers had been delivered in a dull, nerveless monotone; but now the third response came haltingly, as though the speaker employed a language unfamiliar to him; or, rather, as though he had not spoken in any tongue for a long time, and was not sure of himself.

"I—got—control——. Went out—disembodied——" The voice trailed off into silence.

"But what did you do?" persisted Dr. Murnane inexorably.

"Not—much. . . . Ask—Lucas."

The doctor looked at me questioningly.

"I don't know what he means," I said. "I thought he was asleep."

"Mr. Hammond thought you were sleeping," said Murnane. "Explain what you mean."

"No . . . Guy slept."

"Heavens!" I exclaimed. "He talks as if he were someone else. Doctor, this is not natural. Bring him out of this state, for the love of mercy!"

"Yes, perhaps it were better that I should." The doctor made a quick pass over the patient's eyes. "Wake," he commanded.

Guy looked up at us with that strange, puzzled expression.

"Feeling all right?" I enquired anxiously.

He nodded, and turned to Dr. Murnane.

"You must—do—something," he said in that halting, uncertain fashion. "It can't—go on—this—way."

His voice seemed to withdraw itself, and he sank once more into a state of coma.

Dr. Murnane uttered a sharp exclamation, and repeated his quick gesture. Immediately Guy regained consciousness, and this time appeared quite natural.

"Sorry I couldn't answer your questions, doctor," he said, in his usual, slightly drawling voice. "But after the first I seemed to lose control of my tongue."

The doctor looked at him strangely, but said nothing.

"Why, you did answer, old fellow," I exclaimed in surprize. "And you said some mighty queer things. But what did you mean when you were conscious a minute ago by telling Dr. Murnane that he must do something?"

Guy stared at me blankly. "I said nothing like that," he answered. "You've been dreaming, dear chap."

I looked at Dr. Murnane for confirmation, but he only shook his head in perplexity. "It is the strangest thing I have ever known," he said. "I am going to my laboratory now, gentlemen. I may be in to see you later, if you do not object."

When we were alone, Guy turned to me.

"Tell me all that happened, Lucas," he requested.

I gave him a full account.

"Lucas," he said after a short pause, "there's something about this that's uncanny. When I was a little fellow, and lived here at the Towers, the servants used to say I had a strange fashion of talking aloud as if to a child companion. Of course, I know this is not an unusual thing for youngsters to do, but my case was different. I not only talked to this invisible playmate, but would often catch my nurse by the skirts and insist that she must see him in the room with me. They tell me that once I frightened a servant nearly out of her wits by suddenly crying out that she must not sit upon a certain chair, that Buddie was there, and she would hurt him. I continued to believe in this strange companion whom I called Buddie until I was nearly twelve years old. Then I went to India with father, and seemed to forget about him. But now that I am back, I seem to feel the presence of a mind—a something too indefinite to describe——" He broke off, as though unable to find the right words to phrase his vague impression.

"Look here, Guy," I exclaimed, "this has got to stop. If there's such a thing as a spook of any kind in this house, why, we must get it out. That's what the Society of Psychical Research is for; isn't it?"

"No, we must not call them in, Lucas," he protested. "At least, not yet. I have a feeling that this Dr. Murnane may be able to help. Anyway, let's wait and see what he has to tell us this evening."

TRUE to his promise, Dr. Murnane dropped in on us around 8 o'clock. "Gentlemen," he began, turning at once to the subject that filled all our minds, "if we want to learn anything about this strange case, we must be perfectly frank with one another. I am interested from a professional viewpoint, and would like, if you have no objections, Sir Guy, to follow the matter to its conclusion.

Now I want you to tell me if either of you has had any—ah—strange experiences since coming here. Mr. Hammond, suppose you begin; for I saw by your manner at breakfast this morning that you had met with some sort of adventure during the night."

Not sure just how my story would be received, I told him of my experience. When I had finished, he asked, "What was it made you so sure that it was not Sir Guy who lay beside you?"

"I have a very strange power of perception, Dr. Murnane," I told him. "I can sense a man's presence as soon as he enters a room, although I may neither see nor hear him."

"In like manner you would sense it if he went out?"

"Exactly so."

"And did you sense the departure of this stranger last night as you lit the candle?"

"Why, no," I replied. "I don't believe I did. But then I couldn't have, for I went over to the bed fully expecting to find him there."

"This afternoon," he asked, switching the subject abruptly, "did you experience anything out of the ordinary while Sir Guy was sleeping?"

"Yes," I answered, and told him about the Presence. "I know it sounds crazy," I concluded lamely, "but I am ready to take my solemn oath that there was someone or something in this room with me."

"I do not doubt your word, Mr. Hammond," he assured me. "In fact it bears out a vague theory I have been forming. You remember when Sir Guy was hypnotized he replied, when I asked him to tell me what he had been doing, 'Ask Lucas.' That, I believe, is your Christian name; is it not, Mr. Hammond?"

"Yes," I said. "But what does it all mean?"

"Wait and we shall see," he returned. Then, to Guy: "When you lived at the Towers as a child, Sir Guy, was there ever any tale of supernatural influences? Not the usual ghost-stories connected with all old houses, but something definite, touching yourself, for example."

"I might as well tell you what I told Lucas just a bit ago," said Guy, and he related the story of the playmate that no one saw but himself.

"Ah! Now we are coming upon something definite!" exclaimed the doctor eagerly. "I expected that sort of thing would turn up somewhere. You say you used to play with this Buddie until you were nearly twelve years old? Then surely you must retain some distinct memory of him."

"After a fashion, yes," admitted Guy. "But he is confused in my mind with other children whom I knew at the time. Still, I seem to have a recollection of someone—someone who was often with me when I was otherwise alone. But the impression is vague, like the memory of a dream."

"Were you particularly imaginative as a child?"

"No. And that is what doubly puzzled my parents and nurse."

Dr. Murnane strode up and down the room several times before asking any more questions. Presently he inquired, "Did you ever have a brother born before or after you who died in childhood?"

"No," said Guy, "nor a sister. I am an only child."

"There could have been no twin brother who died at birth?"

"No. I'm positive of that. You see, I almost did have a twin. I was born a freak."

"You—a freak!" I cried incredulously. There was nothing about this typical young Englishman to suggest such a thing.

"Yes," he nodded. "But don't look so shocked, Lucas. When I

was born, I had three arms; the two I have now, and an additional little one just below my right shoulder-blade. I also have two spinal cords, but one is dead. It is the belief of the doctors that I was to have had a twin, but that he did not develop."

"Interesting," mused the doctor, talking more to himself than to us. "But still there was no body to have contained a soul. No, I can not see that that explains it. There must be something else."

"Doctor," began Guy, and I could see that only a great effort of will was forcing from him what he was about to say, "I once read of a man into whose body a demon soul had entered ahead of his own. Is such a thing possible?"

"That," replied the doctor gravely, "I can not say. We know that there are powers which we term Elementals——"

He broke off abruptly. From the other side of the house came that same weird cry we had heard earlier in the day! Quicker than lightning, Dr. Murnane sprang to the door. "Wait here. I'll be back in a moment," he flung at us, and was gone.

Left alone, the two of us stared at each other blankly. "Guy," I said suddenly, "I've a mind to follow him and find out, if I can, what this is all about. I'm more than half convinced that it's in some way connected with all the other strange things that have been going on."

"No, Lucas, you must not do that." He laid a restraining hand upon my arm. "Remember, we have promised not to interfere with the doctor's experiments."

"Not even if they may be interfering with us?" I demanded.

"I don't think they are doing that," he replied. "If they were, the doctor would know it, and he was too genuinely surprized by what we told him to have had previous knowledge."

"He did seem in earnest," I admitted. "But I wish he'd give us some explanation of this thing. It's beginning to get on my nerves."

I had barely finished when the door was thrown violently open, and Ferguson staggered in. His face was chalky white, and he was trembling exceedingly.

"Sir Guy," he half choked, "I've seen a ghost!"

"You—what?" Guy stared at him uncomprehendingly. "Ferguson, are you crazy?"

"I—I don't know, sir," the man answered, leaning against a table for support. "I—I hope not."

"Sit down and tell us what you mean."

Ferguson dropped limply into the nearest chair. "I've seen the Presence, sir," he said. "At least, I think that's what it must have been. You see, sir, I was rather curious about what the doctor keeps in the armory, where he has his laboratory, and knowing that he was in here with you gentlemen this evening, I went over to take a look around. I was halfway down the side hall—it's quite dark around there, you know, sir—when all of a sudden I saw something moving over by the armory door. It was going slow and groping, like a mole, you might say, sir; so I stopped to watch it, not knowing what it might be. Then I saw it was the figure of a person, but all dressed in long black robes, like a priest or something. I think I must have made some sort of noise, for it turned its head in my direction, and I saw its face. Sir Guy, there was no life in its eyes; they were like the eyes of a dead man!"

At this point I believe I must have let slip an exclamation of a very profound nature, for Ferguson turned to me appreciatively. "Yes, sir," he said respectfully, "that's what I said,

too. And then the thing opened its jaws and shrieked at me; shrieked just like we heard it this morning! I didn't stay for any more, gentlemen; I ran."

There was a silence when he finished speaking. Neither of us who had heard him felt very much just then like refuting a ghost-story, no matter how improbable it might be. But we were saved the necessity of comment by the return of Dr. Murnane.

"Everything is all right now," he said reassuringly, but his eyes were vaguely troubled, and soon he left us for the night.

"Guy," I said, "that man has something up his sleeve; something that is connected with Ferguson's ghost, if not with all the rest of the fireworks. Instead of going to bed tonight, I'm going to sit up in this room and watch, and I advise you and Ferguson to do the same."

"I'm with you, sir," exclaimed Ferguson eagerly, relieved that he need not spend the long hours of darkness alone.

"Very well," assented Sir Guy. "If you two do it, I will. In fact I'm not keen on shutting myself up in that dreary room after your experience there. We may as well make a night of it down here."

THERE were two couches in the room; so it was decided that one of our number should keep watch while the others slept. Ferguson offered to take the first watch, and promised to call me two hours later to relieve him. I, in turn, was to call Sir Guy two hours after that.

I lay down on my couch and tried to compose myself to sleep, but as the minutes passed I grew more and more wakeful, and soon I found myself staring idly about the room. Over in his chair by the fire I saw Ferguson, his eyes fixed stolidly upon the opposite wall. From the other couch I heard Guy's gentle snore. But his slumber was not the healthful reward of bodily fatigue, but rather the exhaustion following severe mental strain.

Finding sleep impossible for myself, I conjectured regarding the explanation of these occurrences. Was it possible that some power from the other world was reaching out and enfolding my friend in its dark tentacles? Did the ghost of some long-dead ancestor hold a psychic influence over his life? In either case, where did Dr. Murnane fit into the picture? Was he a student of some Eastern cult, who had wittingly or otherwise affected Guy with his experiments? Strangely enough, my mind refused to accept the suggestion that he might have guilty knowledge of the affair; there was something likable about the man that made such a theory untenable. And yet he must be connected in some way; otherwise how explain the closely guarded laboratory and the ghostly figure that Ferguson had seen skulking near it? Confused by all this self-questioning, and unable to arrive at any solution to the problem, I eventually dozed off, and was awakened shortly afterward by Ferguson to begin my watch.

Seating myself in the chair which he had vacated, I prepared for my two hours' vigil. It was, I found upon consulting my watch, a quarter to 12. I would call Guy, then, at a quarter to 2.

All about me the house had become deathly still. There were, I suppose, all the little noises peculiar to night, for utter silence would have been painful to the eardrums; but I heard none of them, or, if I did, my conscious brain made no note of them. Indeed, had it not been for the breathing of my two companions I might have fancied myself alone upon a desert island.

Presently I became aware of a steady tapping upon the window-panes, and realized that it was raining. Soon the regular drumming of the drops began to sound a kind of tattoo in my brain, and lulled by the monotonous rhythm and by the comforting warmth of the fire, I began to nod, and—I blush to confess it—soon fell asleep.

How long I slept I do not know, but I was suddenly awakened by a noise quite close at hand. Sitting up only half awake, I rubbed my eyes vigorously to break the last bonds of sleep, and tried to locate the sound. Before long it came again from the vicinity of the door leading into the hall, and I looked in that direction. To my intense amazement I saw that the door was slowly opening!

With fascinated gaze I watched as inch by inch it was pushed steadily inward. Then when it had opened about a foot and a half, a black-clad figure, bent forward so that I could not see its face, glided into the room and began to cross it with slow, labored movements! Unable either to move or cry out, I watched breathlessly as, its white hands extended gropingly before it, it moved noiselessly across the floor and passed through a door leading into another room! It left no trace behind it. Indeed, in the dim firelight I could not be sure I had really seen it at all. Had it not been for the creaking of the one door as it entered and the click of the latch of the other as it went out, the whole incident might have been merely a trick of fancy.

With a rush my powers of speech and motion returned to me.

"Guy! Ferguson!" I cried, springing to my feet. "Wake up! Something in black just now passed through the room!"

Instantly Ferguson leaped from his couch. "What is it, sir?" he demanded. "What has happened?"

"A figure all in black," I began. "Why—where's Sir Guy?"

Simultaneously we both turned to the other couch. It was empty!

"Gone!" I heard myself gasp in dismayed tones. "Ferguson, if anything has happened to him, I am to blame. Like a traitor, I slept at my post."

"Don't stop to blame yourself now, Mr. Hammond," said Ferguson, starting toward the door. "Wherever he is, we must find him. Come, sir."

I FOLLOWED Ferguson, and together we began to make a hasty search of the lower rooms, calling Guy's name as we went. In the main hall we met Dr. Murnane descending the stairs.

"What's wrong?" he demanded. "Has anything happened?"

"Sir Guy has disappeared," I told him briefly. "For heaven's sake, help us search for him."

The doctor uttered a sharp exclamation. "We must find him at once," he declared. "Hammond, you lead the way. I don't know where you have searched already."

We rushed from one room to another, but without result. In our haste we had not stopped to bring candles, and so we were obliged to depend upon the ragged moonlight (the rain had stopped) for illumination; and this was poor enough. At last we entered the east room, where that very morning (how far away that seemed now!) we had first met Dr. Murnane. As we crossed the threshold, a cloud passed in front of the moon, throwing the room into darkness for several seconds. Then it lifted, and through the broad windows flooded a bright stream of radiance, revealing a huddled figure upon the floor.

Torn between grief and fear, I ran forward and knelt beside it. Yes, it

was Guy, and—I breathed a prayer of thanksgiving—he still lived.

"Let us take him back to the library," said Dr. Murnane, looking over my shoulder. "We can attend to him better there."

Together we carried the unconscious man thither and deposited him upon the couch he had so mysteriously vacated.

"Tell me what happened," requested the doctor while he made efforts to revive Guy.

As best I could I related the whole story, not leaving out the part about the black-robed figure. I had no more than finished when the doctor sprang up, and without a word of explanation vanished through the door which had so recently closed upon my ghostly visitor.

"Now what can he mean by that, sir?" demanded Ferguson, gazing in perplexity after the departed figure.

"Don't bother about him," I commanded. "We have Sir Guy to look after."

But by the time Dr. Murnane returned nearly fifteen minutes later, Guy had not yet shown any signs of returning consciousness.

"It is an attack like the one he had this afternoon," said the doctor when he had examined Guy carefully, "and, if anything, is more pronounced than the first." He stood off a few paces and regarded the unconscious man intently. "This disturbance, whatever it is, is mental and not physical," he declared. "It is a psychic influence that is acting upon his physical body. Now, unless you, as his friend, have some objection to offer, Mr. Hammond, I shall try another hypnotic experiment to learn, if I can, the nature of this disorder."

I signed for him to go ahead. "But can an unconscious man be hypnotized?" I asked.

"Yes," he answered, "although the process and result are somewhat different from the usual thing. For instance, a conscious man, when hypnotized, is vaguely aware of what is going on about him unless the hypnotist wills otherwise; while in the case of an unconscious man, there is no memory at all of what takes place."

He bent forward, and soon I saw that Guy was under his control.

"Guy Sullivan," said the doctor, "you are now a child five years old. Buddie is with you in your nursery. Do you see him?"

After a moment came Guy's voice, monotonous and faint.

"Yes, he is here. He is beside me on the window-seat."

"What is he like?"

"He is my friend. We play together."

"What does he look like?"

"I can't see him with my eyes, but he is here."

"Evidently this spirit did not assume an astral body," murmured the doctor. Then, to Guy, "You are nine years old. What are you doing?"

"We are watching the little brook in the park. Buddie is telling me stories about the little people who live under the stones."

"Now you are twelve."

"My mother is dead. I am crying. Buddie is crying, too."

"You are fifteen now. Buddie is still with you."

There was a slight pause. Then, "No, he is not here."

Without an instant's hesitation, the doctor turned to a new topic. "You now have one of your attacks of loss of memory. Tell me what you are doing."

There was no response. Dr. Murnane repeated his question, but with the same result. I looked at Guy anxiously. Was it my imagination, or was there a subtle change taking place in him? Then I saw that the doctor had noticed it too. There was

a tense note of excitement in his voice as he spoke again.

"Tell me what you are doing."

When the answer came, it was in that strange, halting manner in which several of the replies of the afternoon had been given.

"I am—reading—Shelly's—*Adonais.*"

"Why," I exclaimed, "I never knew him to read a line of poetry in his life unless he had to!"

"Very significant," muttered the doctor. "It must be that after all." Once more he addressed his patient. "Tell me what you did this afternoon."

"I stood—beside Lucas. I tried—to tell him—about myself."

"Is there anything you wish to tell me?"

"Yes . . . help me . . . you can . . . this can't go on . . . it will kill Guy."

The doctor uttered an exclamation of satisfaction. "I'll do it," he said very distinctly, "if your brother is willing."

I stared at him in amazement. What on earth did he mean? Then I saw that he was awakening Guy from the hypnotic trance; and soon my friend opened his eyes and looked up at us.

"Ah! You're conscious! I thought you would be." Dr. Murnane regarded him with the air of one who is well pleased with the way events were working out. "Were you aware that I had you hypnotized?"

"A bit ago," said Guy, "I seemed to be coming round when I heard a voice—I'm sure it was yours—saying something about my having one of my attacks of loss of memory. Then everything seemed to slip away again."

"Ah! Just so!" There was quiet exaltation in Dr. Murnane's voice. "My theory is proven. Sir Guy, I have discovered what has been troubling you, and I think I can relieve you."

"Ripping!" exclaimed Guy enthusiastically. "And now for the love of heaven tell me what it is."

"The influence that has been troubling you," began the doctor, leaning back in his chair, "is the Buddie of your childhood."

"What!" cried Guy. "No, not really!"

"It is indeed true," asserted the doctor. "He himself as good as told me."

Utter silence greeted this statement. There are some situations that can not be relieved by any exclamation, no matter how forceful.

"I will explain," said Dr. Murnane. "As you yourself suggested, you were meant to have a twin, but his body only partially developed. But the divine providence that governs such things had sent two souls; the one which is you, Sir Guy, and another which was to have been your brother. You entered the infant body first; but the other, who was inalienably attached to you, became your constant companion.

"During early childhood when the soul is freest and least hampered by earthly influences, you knew him as an ever-present playmate whom you called Buddie. Then when you grew older and were taken to India, he was drawn into your body, but kept subject to you. But there were short periods of time when he seemed to dominate, as is proved by what you thought were attacks of loss of memory.

"Recently, however, for some reason of which we know nothing, it became necessary that a separation be made; that each soul be allowed to exist on this plane independent of the other. Your brother was being forced irresistibly to the front; yet it was impossible that you both occupy the same body. Chance, or perhaps it was something else whose workings we can not understand, brought you back to your old home,

and here your brother gained greater freedom. Mr. Hammond, I think you will now understand the presence of the stranger last night; also who it was that touched you upon the shoulder this afternoon.

"I can now explain the phenomena that occurred both times I hypnotized Sir Guy," he continued. "This afternoon, not understanding the case, I hypnotized both intelligences under the impression that my first attempt to gain control of a single personality had failed. But when I began asking my questions, Sir Guy, I called you by name, and it was you who answered. Then I looked up to make some remark to Mr. Hammond. When I turned back to you, or rather, to your body, you had gone, and your brother had come. It was he who replied to the remainder of my questions."

"That, then, accounts for the halting manner of speaking!" I exclaimed.

"Exactly," nodded the doctor. "Since he was so seldom in control of the body, speech did not come natural to him.

"Then just a few minutes ago I hypnotized you while you were unconscious, Sir Guy. You answered all my questions until I asked you to tell me what you did during one of your attacks of loss of memory. Of course, since it was not you who governed your body during those times, you could not answer. But after a few minutes your brother came forward, as I hoped he would do—I had already begun to suspect the truth—and answered my questions. When he stated that he had been reading a certain selection of poetry, Mr. Hammond was mystified, for he knew that you did not care for that sort of thing; but to me it was definite proof of my theory. He then asked me to help him, and realizing that it was in my power to do so—perhaps uniquely in my power—I consented, on condition that you were willing."

He paused, and we who were his listeners looked at one another in awe. Had ever mortal ear heard so strange a tale before?

"You say you can assist in this strange matter?" inquired Guy presently. "How?"

"By means of the experiment that has been my life work." Dr. Murnane rose. "Come, gentlemen, to my laboratory."

Like eager children on the brink of some great adventure, we followed him. I, for one, felt my every nerve tingle with excitement as, the dark corridors traversed, we drew up before the door of what had once been the armory. Dr. Murnane took a key from his pocket, and inserted it in the lock.

As the door swung open we all crowded eagerly across the threshold. The room beyond was like most laboratories in general appearance, but a second glance about it revealed strange machines and instruments which none of us had ever before seen or heard of.

Passing these without a word, Dr. Murnane led us to the farther end of the room, where something was lying upon a couch covered with a dark cloth.

"Here is my experiment," he announced, and threw aside the cloth.

Upon the couch lay the figure of a man shrouded in black, flowing garments. His features were delicate and clear-cut, and their almost Grecian beauty was rather emphasized than marred by the unnatural pallor of the complexion. His long black hair was brushed straight back from his high, pale forehead, and his eyes were closed, allowing his heavy black lashes to rest lightly upon his cheeks. Indeed, he would have been a remarkably handsome man were it not for a certain strange lack of expres-

sion—a lack too suggestive of a corpse before rigor mortis has set in.

"My word!" gasped Guy, drawing back. "Is—is he dead?"

"No," said the doctor, "he is not dead. But neither does he live in the true sense of the word.

"Ever since I attended the university in Germany, I have been interested in producing life artificially. I made all the usual experiments with microbe life, and was more than successful. Then I grew ambitious, and determined to produce organic matter by similar means. For years I experimented, but without result. Then one day, almost entirely by accident, I made the great discovery. The result lies before you."

"Heavens!" I cried incredulously. "Do you mean to say that this man was produced by the same means by which certain bacteria are raised from vegetable matter?"

"Practically, yes," he replied. "And it may interest you to know that he is only four years old. I have discovered what it is that governs age, and could change any one of you into an infant or a decrepit old man within the space of a few hours."

"Holy Saint George!" muttered Ferguson, and drew back.

"In every way his body is perfect," said the doctor proudly, indicating the figure before us; "more perfect, in fact, than that of the average man." He bent over and laid his hand affectionately upon the dark hair. "I call him my son," he explained. "I never had any other child. I have given him my name." He bent closer to the motionless figure. "Open your eyes, Niles," he commanded. "Look at me."

Slowly the man on the couch obeyed, and as he did so, a little gasp of horror escaped Guy and me. There was no soul behind those eyes!

"Ah! You see his deficiency." The doctor turned to us sadly. "I have been able to give him everything but the one thing necessary to make him really live—a soul. In reality he is not a man. He is—nothing."

"But he obeyed you when you spoke to him!" I protested.

"Only as the steel obeys the magnet," answered Dr. Murnane. "He could not have done otherwise. It was only my mind governing the material body."

"But does he never move independently of you?" asked Guy.

"No—that is, never before yesterday. Then for the first time in his life—if we can say he *has* a life—he actually moved from one place to another without my command."

I shuddered, remembering my mysterious visitant and Ferguson's ghost.

"You may wonder," continued the doctor, "why, when I found my experiment had failed in its main essential, I should let this empty husk go on existing. Of course, it was always possible for me to destroy him, but—well, I could not. There are some things a man can not bring himself to do, even when he knows them to be more merciful. Now I am glad I acted as I did." He turned to Guy. "Do you understand now why I have brought you here?" he asked.

"It is your intention to transfer the soul of—my brother—to this body?" Guy spoke in a tense whisper, like one who is awed by the very thought he had dared to formulate.

"Exactly. You ask me how I know I can do it? Because it was your brother who controlled this body when it moved and tried to speak yesterday. It is what he wanted me to do when he asked me to help him this evening."

Guy looked down into the dull, expressionless eyes that stared unseeingly up at him. "And when you

have done this thing, will he be a normal man?" he asked.

"I am sure of it."

"You will do this by hypnotism?"

"Yes."

"Very well. Go ahead."

"One minute." The doctor spoke hesitatingly. "There is one thing which I am bound in honor to tell you. There is a chance, on a scale of about one to ten, that the soul which leaves your body and enters this one may not be your brother, but you yourself. I can not govern that. Do you wish to take the chance?"

Once more Guy regarded the body upon the couch. "In any case it will be a great adventure," he said, his steady gray eyes glowing with resolution. "Yes, I will take the chance."

The doctor placed two armchairs about eight feet apart, facing each other. Then he motioned Guy to be seated in one of them.

"If my soul enters the other body," Guy asked whimsically as he sat down, "who will I be, myself or the other fellow?"

"You'll still be yourself," smiled the doctor, "although I fear you would have to forfeit your baronetcy to your brother. That goes with your material body, you know."

"Well, it would still be in the family," laughed Guy. "Here's hoping my brother proves a congenial sort of chap."

"Heavens, man! Don't jest about it," I said. "It's too serious a matter."

Dr. Murnane turned to the body on the couch. "Niles," he called sharply, "come here."

Slowly that deathlike figure without a soul rose and began to shuffle toward him. Ferguson and I drew back involuntarily. The thing was positively gruesome.

"Sit down."

The figure dropped into the chair opposite Guy.

From another part of the room Dr. Murnane wheeled up a queer-looking machine, part of which was composed of a round disk covered with tiny, brightly polished mirrors.

"This is a hypnotizing machine," he explained. "When I start it, the disk will revolve very rapidly, while the light reflected by the mirrors will hypnotize whoever watches it. It will have no effect upon Niles, since he has no mind for it to act upon; but it will hypnotize you and your brother very quickly, Sir Guy. Mr. Hammond and Ferguson, be careful not to let your eyes rest upon it even for an instant."

He threw over a switch, and the wheel began to revolve. I caught a glimpse of blinding, flashing lights as I turned away. The great experiment had begun.

For what seemed an eternity I stood listening to the low whirring of that wheel. Afterward I learned that it had run not quite five minutes, but to such a key were my nerves screwed up that each second seemed an hour. At last there came a click, and the whirring ceased.

I turned around. Guy sat inertly in his chair, his eyes fixed unseeingly upon the machine. The other figure seemed the same as it had been before.

Quickly Dr. Murnane pushed the machine aside. Then he bent over Guy, and began to speak to him, but what he was saying I could not hear. For a long time he spoke in low, even tones, his voice becoming persuasive, compelling, soothing and encouraging by turns.

Presently I saw that something had come over Guy. It was as if a battle of some sort was being waged within him. His body grew tense, then began to tremble ever so slightly, as though both nerves and muscles were being overstrained. Seeing this, Dr. Murnane began to work harder, ex-

erting all his energy in a supreme mental effort. As he worked, great beads of sweat appeared upon his forehead and began to roll down his face.

Suddenly I became aware of another presence. Instead of four people in the room, there were now five. Instinctively I turned my attention to the thing in the chair.

As I looked, a change began to come over it. It did not stir, it did not so much as move a muscle; but gradually that indescribable expression departed from the face, and while its place was not taken by an actual look of conscious intelligence, something entered it that made it appear less deathlike.

Dr. Murnane left Guy, who, I noticed, seemed at ease again, and went over to this other. For several minutes he regarded him intently, as if assuring himself of certain facts. Then he turned to us.

"My part is finished now," he said in colorless tones that served to hide the true emotion he must have felt. "The result lies with providence."

He turned to Guy, and, with a snap of his fingers and a sharp command, released him from the mesmeric trance.

I held my breath, awaiting the outcome. Would this man be my friend, or a total stranger? The next minute he spoke, and with a sigh of relief I recognized Guy's familiar drawl.

"My word, but that was a weird experience! I was conscious, and yet I wasn't. Is it all over, Doctor?"

"So far as you are concerned, yes," said Murnane. "And now——"

He walked to the other chair, and we all followed.

With a voice that trembled he spoke the word to bring his patient out of the hypnotic state. There was a tense moment. What were we about to witness?

Slowly the man raised his head and looked about him. The dull, lifeless expression had gone from his eyes, but its place was taken by the puzzled, uncomprehending stare of one who suddenly finds himself in unfamiliar surroundings. Dazedly he passed a hand across his forehead.

"Where am I?" He spoke haltingly, like one from whom the power of speech has long been absent. We all started violently. The sound of a human voice issuing from what but a few moments ago had been but an empty husk seemed unreal—impossible!

Dr. Murnane bent over him. "You are at Sullivan Towers," he said. "Does not the name suggest anything to you?"

The other shook his head. "How did I get here?" he asked. "I can't seem to remember—anything."

For a dismayed instant the doctor looked incredulous. Then——

"I should have known," he muttered, speaking more to himself than to any of his listeners. "The brain cells of the new body are unindented by any workings of the mind, and the spirit was unable to carry over any impressions made while in the old body. It could not have been otherwise." He beckoned to Guy to approach. "Do you recognize this man?" he asked.

The man in the chair regarded Guy long and thoughtfully.

"It seems as if I had known him somewhere," he said finally. "As if—I had lived before, and had known him then."

"And these others?" indicating Ferguson and me.

"I never saw them before."

THERE the doctor had to let matters rest; and we, who had had more than enough of the supernatural, were quite content to let him do so. Whether the man now known as Niles Sullivan was merely some poor unfortunate injured, perhaps, in the

World War and partially restored to health by Murnane on that memorable night, or indeed the spiritual brother of Sir Guy, we do not know; perhaps shall never know. That an organism of the highest order could be produced in a laboratory seems impossible; nor is the fact that Dr. Murnane refuses to repeat his experiment a good argument for its possibility.

In every way Niles Sullivan is a normal man, except that his memory does not extend beyond that night in the laboratory. Of the reputed history of his existence he knows nothing, but believes himself to be Guy's twin brother, suffering from loss of memory through shell shock. More than likely the shell shock part is true; yet why should the doctor have conducted such an elaborate scheme for the sole purpose of impressing two very ordinary young men with his unusual powers? Also, how account for my very strange experiences both in Guy's bedroom and in the library?

Whenever Guy and I speak of these matters, we convince ourselves, for the time, at least, that it was all due to hypnotism, and that some day Dr. Murnane will confess to the trick. Yet such an explanation, no matter how exhaustive it may be, could never account for the strange state of telepathic communication which at times exists between Guy and Niles.

But be the explanation what it may, I am convinced that the experiment brought us very near to those mysterious "things in heaven and earth" of which no man has complete knowledge; nearer, perhaps, than it is well for any of us to approach. Perhaps sometime, in a manner now hidden from us, the truth will become known. Meanwhile we must be content to regard it as a mystery, and find for it whatever explanation most appeals to us.

THE POET

***By* A. LESLIE**

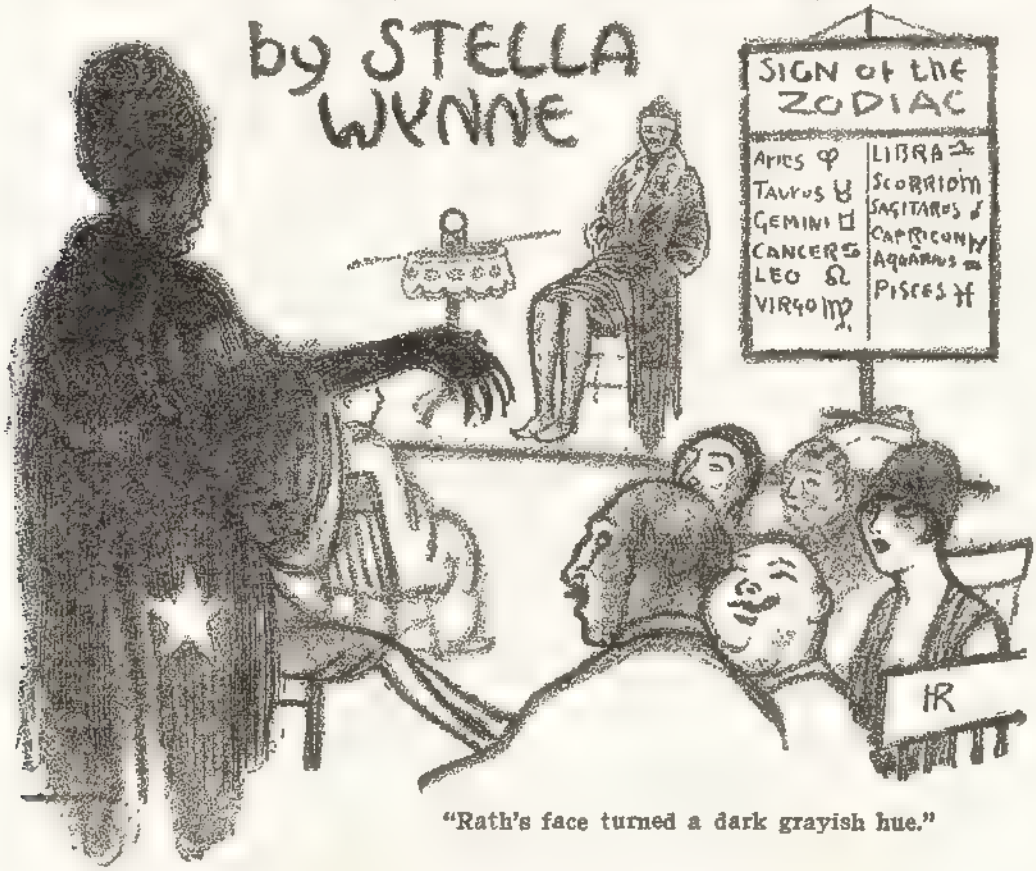
I found high Rome in marble
I left it pearl and jade;
I added crowns of stardust
To the gods the Greeks had made;
I garlanded the splendors
Of Nineveh and Tyre;
I weaved a wreath of lightning
About Prometheus' fire.

Ulysses and Achilles,
Bold Hector, Alfaqui—
I drew them from the darkness
And bade them never die.
I burnished Arthur's armor
And the shield of Launcelot;
Mine was the web that glamored
The Lady of Shalott.

The stars a net behind me,
The mornlight in my eyes—
I walk 'mid steel and roses
Where the last adventure lies.

EBONY MAGIC

by STELLA WYNNE



"Rath's face turned a dark grayish hue."

HE WAS black. I was white. Night after night we were the only non-yellow men in the tucked-away Chinatown restaurant where one could still procure *chow mein* or *chow yuk* for very little indeed. Night after night now I had watched some incredible thing happening to this black man.

I had first seen him a month before, his bronze-dark, blunt profile outlined against a blaze of mustard yellow. Although it was only the coloring of the wrappers of bean cakes piled high on the shelf beside him, this mustard yellow was the exact shade to throw into relief, flamboyantly as if it were depicted on a poster, his tight-curled head.

There was something exhilarating in his gusto that first night, in his fine animalness. He smacked his lips loudly over his rice, lips outlined thickly as if in purple chalk against the dusk of his face. His softly shining negroid eyes caught light flickers like dark jewels; the planes of his face gave back light like polished wood.

But tonight there was no heartiness in him. He but nibbled at the young green peas cooked in their pods. I had watched him through the month going from bad to worse.

The skin had fallen away from his high cheekbones like canvas from the ridgepoles of a tent; it had begun to take on the silvery tones of a black skin in illness. But it was his eyes that faltered out the truth. There was an evil spirit in the jungle of his mind. Some fear was living off his vitals. No one could doubt tonight as he started toward my table that he was a hunted, sick nigger.

"Evenin', boss."

I saw he wanted to talk. "Sit down, Rath," I said. He had told me his name was Rath Jackson.

He hesitated, a sort of hesitation to assume equality, then lowered himself into the chair. His black paws —I always thought of them as paws for they seemed both stronger and limberer than hands—he curled together on the oilclothed table edge.

"Out of work now, Rath?" I asked.

"Well . . . yes, sah, and no, sah . . . dat is, Ah got work if Ah wants it."

The strange look spread again like a gray film over his gaunt face.

"You mean you get a little work on and off, but not much money coming in—eh?"

"No, Ah don' mean dat. Money jus' naturally don' mean nothin' to me, boss, when Ah works at ma job."

"Why don't you work at it, then?"

"Jus' naturally don' like it."

I grew curious. "What is it?" I asked.

His hands squirmed; I could hear the slight shuffle of his feet. "Ah don' want to say . . . if you don' min'."

To cover his embarrassment he picked up a book I had placed on the table beside me and idly opened it about the middle. He could read well enough, I saw that, but the book —a modern one on travel in Abyssinia written by a distinguished Frenchman—was full of the terms of medicine, anthropology, psychology. Rath's high, narrow black forehead became trisected by two enormous wrinkles; the skin, loosened by his emaciation, seemed to fold over. He put up his hand and scratched his ear.

"Wha' all dat about, boss?"

I looked into the open book. It was a chapter on the so-called "magic" of the black witch-doctors, some of whose performances, looked at unscientifically, the author stated, seemed actually to verge on the supernatural. His explanation was that it was merely mind-reading—telepathy—authentic instances of which are reported every now and then to scientific bodies. He went deeply into the psychology of it. I tried to think of small clear words in which to explain it to Rath.

"This man's a great traveler, Rath—goes into distant countries, you know, and tells about what he sees; the people, the way they do things and everything. He's telling about Abyssinia——"

"Where dat, boss?"

"Do you know where Egypt is?"

"His sunken eyes unexpectedly lighted. He spoke up quickly, pridefully, like a schoolboy: "Sho' do. E-gypt—de oldest country in de known worl'! E-gypt—de cradle of de human race! E-gypt—where de Nile Ribber flow!"

"Well," I said, somewhat surprized at his burst of knowledge, "Abyssinia is south of Egypt, mountainous, in some parts quite inaccessible—hard for people to get into, you know. Paul du Bois, who wrote this book, says he has seen almost unbelievable things among the natives —they're dark there, too—what they call 'magic.' Sometimes they go into trances for days—then again, sometimes the witch doctors are able to tell what is in a person's mind. For instance——"

I heard a gasp. I looked up at an amazing sight. The negro's eyes popped like marbles; his lips drew back from his perfect teeth.

"Dat's stuperstition!" he shouted. "Ah don' believe in dat. Ah don'

believe no magic can make nobody know wha's in ma min'. Ah don' think white folks oughter write stuff like dat—dey oughter know better."

His black hands were clenched. He looked like an animal about to spring, to rend, to tear; what he panted to tear seemed to be this superstition of old Africa. His hands uncurled.

"Ah don' believe in no stuperstition whatsoever," he declared with vehemence but with less fury. The dying of his fury left him trembling, so violent had its short storming been. "Let's see dat book."

He almost snatched it from my hand. He began poring over it; his forehead again showed the two great pleated wrinkles with smaller ones etched in between. He spelled out the strange terms of a new psychology softly to himself; he held the book closer and closer to his savage, black, far-seeing eyes as if he would intimidate it, conquer it. But it was too much for him. He could not understand it—and suddenly the very fact of his non-understanding brought relief to him.

"Aw, dat book ain't some shucks! Dat's all fool nonsense." The relief grew in his voice. He couldn't make it out, therefore it was gibberish. "Frenchies is all like dat. Dat frog-eater's jus' pretendin'."

He tossed the book contemptuously on the table and I saw he was no longer troubled about it. He had sufficiently explained it to himself. He looked at me out of the corner of his eye, just becoming conscious himself of his behavior—to see how I had taken it. He glanced up at the clock.

"Ah mus' be gettin' back to Belle." Of a sudden he added out of nowhere, "Ah'm daid broke, boss. Ah—Ah guess Ah jus' about got to begin ma—ma job 'gain."

Over his gaunt black face there rolled stiffly a wave of fear.

One night two weeks later, chancing to wander down into lower Third Street, I saw a small crowd before a ramshackle vacant store. A round chart of the zodiac in red, yellow and green divisions blazed brightly behind the cracked window-glass. The chart was crowned with the caption, unassailably true, "KNOWLEDGE IS POWER." Other brilliantly lettered placards conveyed the information that the Princess Fatima, who was one of the most esoterically gifted ladies in the entire world, would convey mystic information to all comers, absolutely free. Reassured by the "absolutely free," I entered and placed myself well to the back of the rag-tag crowd.

On a sort of low stage at the far end of the store, in what went for royal Egyptian robes, there sat in an ornate chair badly in need of regilding, a slim mulatto girl. She sat there beautifully poised, beautifully at ease, and was a striking picture with the red curtains, bedizened with golden stars and crescents, behind her. Her skin was faintly yellow-brown like a leaf. Her black hair was curly but not woolly, her great dark eyes were pools of light—mysterious, indrawn eyes, I thought.

A tall, skinny man with a smudge of dirty gray stubble covering his sunken face poked me with his elbow and volunteered, "Guy's goin' to make the high pitch now, mister."

"The what?" I ventured.

"Aw, a geezer comes out and gits the crowd worked up to a high pitch of interest so's they'll buy what he's sellin'. Look!"

The curtains behind the mulatto girl suddenly pulled apart. A gorgeous being in a flame-colored robe, a glorified fez on his head, stepped forth.

It was Rath Jackson.

Through the crimson shimmer of his tawdry splendor I could see that he had grown even thinner; his bones were rawer and the silveriness

more pronounced in his black skin. His spirit vibrated within him, it seemed to me, like a skeleton in the wind.

He raised his arm, and his black hand—powerful, limber, pawlike—appeared at the end of his regally flowing but slightly dirty sleeve.

"Ladies and gentlemun," he addressed in a grandly ceremonious manner this audience of masculine riffraff besprinkled with street-walkers, "you see before you in dat chair"—he pointed to the yellow girl—"one of de greates' wonders of de worl'—if not *de* greates'—de Princess Fatima!"

The crowd followed with languid glance his dramatically pointing forefinger. They had too often been treated to some greatest wonder in the world.

"Dis dusky li'l lady, ladies an' gentlemun, goes back in knowledge to E-gypt, de lan' of de Pharaohs, where once her family reigned. E-gypt—de oldes' country in de known worl'! E-gypt, de cradle of de human race! E-gypt, where flow de Ribber Nile! Wif de priests of E-gypt an' in dose ol' temples dere—more 'specially in de temple of de goddess I-sis—has been preserve' de secrets which de Princess Fatima, born wif a veil, in all dese United States alone is heir to! Ain't no country in de worl' which so 'bounds wif de lore of de occult as de lan' of Egypt."

He stopped suddenly, then added, " 'Cept maybe A-by-seen-ya, a country we-all don' know so much about, which lies up 'longside of E-gypt. Ah reckon dis here A-by-seen-ya is de country mos' chock-full of occult lore in de worl'."

I recognized the genesis of this last remark—but why should he shoot a quick, fearful glance at the girl as if she, in some manner, were connected with A-by-seen-ya?

"An' now ladies an' gentlemun, dis li'l lady will give a de-monstration of de power of her mi-raculous gif' like as such none of yo' ladies or gentlemun has ever seen befo'. She will do somethin' which few people in de entire worl' can do! I will tie dis bandage—you all see what it is, a heavy black silk gentlemun's handkerchief—'round her eyes, an' blin'-fol', she will call de name of any article any person in dis audience shows me—nay, mo', ladies an' gentlemun, she will call de firs' name of any lady or gentlemun, an' tell deir berfdays. Don' look anxious, ladies, she won't tell de year."

He turned in the direction of the girl and waved his hand: "Princess Fatima."

She arose and bowed, and there was something in her which forced respect from that gargoylish crowd, ready enough to hoot, to hiss, or to laugh.

RATH bandaged her eyes, then stepped down into the audience, his royal robes swishing.

"Now, who gwine be firs'? Who gwine show me some objec'?"

A wisp of a man stepped forward. With great secretiveness he showed something to Rath.

"*A* penknife," called out the blindfolded girl.

She continued to call out in rapid succession as the Prince of Egypt walked from person to person: "*A* watch—Ingersoll. *A* collar-button. *A* handkerchief—gentlemun's. *A* union card—Teamster's Local 146."

I tried to make out what method of communication they were using. I was surprized at the mastery, the smoothness these two showed in their work; such ability was seldom seen outside good vaudeville stages.

"Now, ladies and gentlemun," said Rath, "who-all wants deir name and berfday called? Who-all?" He snapped his fingers. "Who-all? Speak up."

A woman in a bright cerise straw hat, her mouth rouged to the color of

raw meat, wishing to draw attention to herself said loudly, "Me!" and giggled.

"Lady wants her name and berf-day tol'. Very well, madam—jus' whisper de info'mation to me."

He bent toward the woman and her raw lips whispered into his black ear. A moment later the mulatto girl said in her peculiar singsong, "Lady's name is Mabel—bawn on de nineteenth of July—under de influence of Cancer."

Mabel's butchery lower lip hung loose with astonishment.

The Prince of Egypt capitalized the moment. "Under de in*flu*ence of Cancer," he repeated weightily; "yeh, ladies an' gentlemun, an' each an' ebery one of us is under de in*flu*ence of some planet whose magnetic *vi*brations works us good or ebil. Each an' ebery one of us is under de in*flu*ence of de stars of deir nativity whether dey like it or not. Any lady or gentlemun dat wants a written account dat dey can always keep to refer to an' which shows yo' faberable an' unfaberable days according to de aspect of yo' rulin' planet, here an' now has de opportunity to obtain same. Each chart directs you what days to act and what days not to act, when to ask fo' a job an' when to propose to yo' bes' girl, when to change yo' business or yo' residence, an' when yo' mudder-in-law is likely to visit yo'. . . ."

The old joke got the old laugh, although few indeed of that audience had homes or mothers-in-law.

Rath followed up the laugh quickly with, "De price of dis invaluable astrological chart is only ten cents, one dime, an' yo' neber spent a dime better. Now, lady," he turned to Mabel, "shall I fetch you down a chart?"

"I'll take one," she said automatically, her mind still dazed with the mystery of her accessible birthdate.

Rath drew out from a pile of printed matter a sheet whose top was largely lettered *JULY — CANCER* and handed it to her.

Business became good. It was a little fuel to the ego-flames of these rags and tags of humanity to hear something so primarily their own as their names and birth-dates called out in an assemblage. It put them in such good humor that, unconscious of the cause, they nearly all dredged up grimy dimes. From end to end of the place there was a white paper blossoming, an unfolding of printed sheets, the bending of outcast heads over mystic destinies. Over it all the singsong of the mulatto girl rose and fell as Rath worked.

"Gentleman's name's Fred-rick—bawn December twenty-fourth. . . ."

"Yeh—almos' a Christmas present fo' his mammy!" The Prince of Egypt injected humor into the solemnity of the occult.

He stopped almost opposite me without seeing me and placed his hand on the shoulder of a short, fat man who had signaled him. The man stood on tiptoe to whisper into his ear.

Fatima called out, "George—gentlemun's name is George—bawn August fourteenth."

I was astonished to see Rath's face suddenly turn a dark grayish hue—his eyes pop. He looked more startlingly thin than ever, like an affrighted skeleton. The Thing, whatever it was, that had residence in his brain, had given him full sight of its horror. His glance shot up to the stage and rested on the mulatto girl who sat poised, blindfolded in her chair, awaiting his next question. It rested on her only a second, but it seemed in that second his agony deepened almost unbearably. . . .

I stretched out my hand and touched his arm. He jumped as if an electric current had struck him. Then immeasurable relief flooded

over his face. He seized my hand in his icy black paws.

"Oh"—it was almost a moan—"oh, boss. . . ."

Then he began to come back to himself. He slowly grew from a terrified negro into the proportions of the Prince of Egypt. He waved a dignified if shaky arm over the audience.

"Dis finish tonight's entertainment, ladies and gentlemun."

He turned to me as the two of us stood—rocks in the stream of outgoing people. He pointed up toward the stage and said in a voice of great heartiness, in which I felt there was an attempt to wipe from my mind the memory of his fear, or at least make me think I had made a mistake in interpreting it as such: "Dat's ma wife. Dat's Belle, boss. Come on up and see her."

Up on the low stage Belle had already taken the black silk bandage from her eyes. She bowed with a good deal of dignity in her glittering robes.

"Like de show, suh?" she asked a little timidly.

"Marvelous stuff. Almost made me believe in the occult," I smiled.

Belle looked pleased and glanced up quickly at Rath. But the latter suddenly frowned and burst out, "Don' yo' neber let nobody fool you wif no occult stuff, boss. It's all jus' tricks. Belle an' me here works a code. Ah fastens dat bandage so's she can see jus' a little under it; she has little mirrors sewed on her sleeves to help. De way Ah hol's ma fingers, ma han's, ma arms, ma shoulders—whether Ah stan's on de lef' side, right side, or directly in front of de pusson—de way Ah pitches ma voice, de jokes Ah makes—ebery li'l single things means somethin'. Mos' things folks in an audience shows yo' is a lot alike—handkerchiefs, knives, rings, watches, gloves—stuff like dat, an' we has signs fo' dem all. We has signs fo' all de common firs' names of people, fo' each month, fo' all de dates from one to thirty-one."

"We learn all dat down Memphis way," supplemented Belle, smiling.

"Yeh—Ah had a job helpin' a magician an' Belle was de girl he raise by le-vitation. Dat was eight years 'go. We been goin' round country eber since—makin' good money, until——"

Something constricted his throat.

He looked at Belle. She glanced quickly away with an oddly guilty look. I wondered if that look had anything to do with his fear of a few minutes before.

I felt, in spite of their evident affection for each other, that there was something queer and strained between these two. How strange a mixture was this mulatto girl—the deep black blood of Africa paled out by the white blood of the north! Rath was all primitive, I felt, but this girl had inherited subtleties of the spirit; there were things she would feel, motives she would follow, acts she would do of which her husband would forever be incapable. Yet I could see that she adored Rath.

As I walked home there kept recurring to my mind Rath's spasm of fear, the tortured look he had cast at the girl, her later look of guilt, yet not exactly guilt, either. Had Belle, his mulatto wife, anything to do with the fear which was eating like an acid into his life—which was undermining this splendid animal mentally and physically?

I was shocked the next time I saw Rath. Two weeks had passed, but it seemed that no two weeks could have caused so terrible a degeneration in a human being. He sat at a table in the little Chinese restaurant, but he touched not so much as a bite of the food he had ordered. His hands trembled. He waited until I had finished my very late dinner—waited in agony, it seemed to me—then came quickly over.

"Say, lissen, boss—will you do me a f-favor? Will you walk home wif me?"

I nodded, somewhat mystified.

It had begun to rain by the time we got outside; the wind, too, had started talking in a big, hollow voice. Rath's house luckily was not far; a tiny cottage in a small negro district on the edge of Chinatown. His key rattled crazily around the keyhole before he was able to steady his hand and open the door.

The front room of the negro couple was neat but shabby, with the shabbiness of cheap pine furniture. There were innumerable little reminders of Belle; some light tan straw half sewn on a hat shape, rose-colored silkaleen drapes at the windows, a calendar—a sentimental picture of a golden-haired child—tacked to a door with a bow of pink ribbon. This door was the only one in the front room other than the hall door through which we had entered. I noticed Rath cast quick, short glances at it.

"Don' go yet, boss," he pleaded. "Sit down."

I wouldn't have left him for anything. I wouldn't have left even a dog whose eyes were staring at nothing and whose neck ruff was bristling with fear.

"I'll stay. But you'd best get into bed, Rath—you're shivering. Got any quinine in the house?"

"Ah don' need no quinine. Ah ain't got no breakbone feber. Ah don' want to go to bed."

The pecking of the rain at the windows through the silence, and the actions of the negro, began to depress me. Something of the terror which possessed him reached fingers into my consciousness.

"Rath," I said, to make talk, "how's the horoscope business? How's Scorpio, Cancer, and Taurus? Raking in the dimes?"

"Ah ain't in dat business no mo'. Cain't," he whispered, "*cain't*—on 'count of *her*." He glanced toward the door to which the calendar was tacked. Belle, then, was in there—probably asleep, for it was almost 10 o'clock. I must lower my voice.

Rath stared out the windows, which looked like pieces of ice in brown water against the windy opaqueness beyond them. He suddenly turned and looked up at me.

"O, Lawdy"—his black hands twisted together—"Ah got to talk. Pretty soon you gwine to leave, boss, an' Ah's gwine to be——"

He stopped short on the threshold of the word. His hands came down in jerky blows to his knees.

"Well, talk, Rath."

He hitched his chair nearer me and put the tips of his fingers on my arm.

"Do yo' believe, boss, dat dey is eber debbils aroun'—ebil spirits roamin' roun' changin' things?"

I was amazed at the look on his face, at his quick glance toward the bedroom door. "Superstition, Rath!" I said.

"Yeh—Ah know—stuperstition."

The wind blowing in around the window edges bellied out the rose-colored drapes that gave such a feminine touch to the poor room.

"Ah ain't neber uster be superstitious; no matter how slick an occult thing Ah seen Ah always reckon dere was some trick at de bottom of it."

He was silent for a minute, then added in a whisper, "Boss, dat night at de show when you reached out an' put yo' han' on ma arm—well, Ah hadn't given Belle no signal whatsoeber when she up an' calls out 'Gentlemun's name is George'."

He turned his great eyes in his gaunt face up to me.

"Well," I said, "well, perhaps you were a little slow, and she took a chance calling out. George isn't an uncommon name."

"Dat's what Ah thought, too, firs' time she done it—in San Francisco here 'bout six months ago. Then—seem like somethin' come over Belle. Couple of nights later she called out

three times—names or berfdays—wifout me once givin' her de signal. It made me creep all over, her a-doin' thataways. How come she know dose things wifout ma signals?

"Ah fire dat question right quick at her after de show. First off she try to say she got de signals—but Ah *knowed*. Den she say, 'Oh, well . . . Ah don' jus' know exactly how comes Ah do dat. Seems like dose names jus' naturally pop into ma min' an' den pop outer ma mouf.'

"She took it awful light, like as if it might happen to anybody. But Ah jus' thought about it an' thought about it way into de night an' nex' day. How come any woman know what dose folks' names was wifout anythin' to know by? Why, she was *doin'* what we was pretendin' to do!

"Well, a few nights later she sho' nuf did it again. After dat Ah got so jumpy and fidgety waitin' fo' it to come dat Ah could hardly get ma signals right. Ah tried to be quicker dan Ah eber was, an' believe me, boss, Ah ain't neber been slow. Finally she did it an' Ah had a feeling in de pit of ma stomick like Ah was gwine to vomit.

"After dat night, when she seen how Ah feel, she promise she wouldn't do it no mo'—but seems like she couldn't help it, an' she done it every onct in a while anyway.

"Ah got so nervous 'bout de whole thing and so full of worriment seems like Ah had to talk to someone. One day in a barber shop Ah met up wif Bob Guinas, young colored feller Ah know, an' I spill out all 'bout it. He say he know jus' what it is—dat she had an ebil spirit in her an' dat *he* was givin' her de knowledge. He say dere was lots of cases jus' like dat—more'n folks eber know about. He'd jined up wif a church a while back an' he wants me to bring Belle dere. He say dey would pray over her an' sprinkle her wif blessed water an' pretty soon dat ebil spirit would be exorcised. He say lots of times folks dat were possessed got dat done fo' dem, an' time after time somethin' like smoke come outer deir mouf, an' a moment later dey could see somethin' black and shadderlike but in human form running away wif its head covered where de drops of blessed water had burned.

"Well, Ah didn't want to believe dat Belle had no ebil spirit in her, an' Ah tol' him it sounded like stuperstition to me, but he say, 'Well, all right, Rath, yo' wait an' *see*. If a pusson ain't cleansed of dat ebil spirit dat takes possession of deir body, well, it gets more'n more of a holt until dey jus' become it, an' it dem, an' ain't dey own selves no mo'.'

"Ah got thinkin' more'n mo' 'bout what Bob Guinas tol' me, an' although it seem like stuperstition, de mo' it seem like it may be so, too. Ol' parson down souf when Ah was a chile uster say de Bible say dey is ebil as well as good spirits, an' de ebil spirits is debbils roaming round de worl' lookin' fo' a hab'tation.

"Ah sho' hated to think dat of Belle—but ebery night now in de show seems to me I could catch de shadder of dat ebil spirit whisperin' in her ear. Seem like somethin' uster go through de audience wif me, an' Ah could hear somethin' laugh low when she got de name or berfday wifout ma signal.

"One day Ah couldn't stan' it no mo'. Ah close down de show in de middle of things—an' Ah didn't open it no mo'. Belle seemed sort of reliebed, Ah thought, though we didn't talk about why Ah done it.

"Things was fixin' fo' to turn out well fo' while. Ah done odd jobs aroun' an' Belle stayed wif a couple of chilluns nights three times a week—dose times Ah went to de Chinese restaurant. De idea of dat ebil spirit livin' in Belle begun to grow dim. . . ."

His hands clenched suddenly. He gave a quick look at the bedroom

door, then stared out the dark, rain-tapped window-pane.

"One evenin' Ah was sittin' here readin' in de paper about somethin' in dat city Rome, Italy, an' she was over by the gas plate cookin'. Ah thought, 'Ah'll ask Belle does she know if dat Eyetalian city is bigger'n San Francisco,' but somethin' else caught ma eye an' Ah didn't ask. But she turned her head suddenly an' say, 'Ah sho' think it bigger'n San Francisco, Rath,'—an' seem to me Ah heard dat little, funny laugh 'gain!

"During de nex' week Ah watch close, an' maybe four or five times she would answer me things Ah hadn't spoke an' dat was only in ma min'. When she did, all ma strength would go an' ma knees would get bendy as if dey was made of water. Funny thing was seems like she didn't hardly know she done it. Dat made me more'n mo' think maybe dere was somethin' else answerin' through her voice an' Belle didn't really know nothin much 'bout it.

"Boss, it was 'bout dis time de terrible thing come to me—quick, like lightnin' outer de sky. . . ."

His big black hands squirmed one over the other.

"I got to lie 'wake nights. I uster look over at Belle and wonder was dere an ebil spirit in her body, an' was Ah lyin' dere sleepin' beside an ebil spirit dat mocked at me?

"Maybe Ah should have runned away from de house an' Belle at dat time—but we'd always been together workin' since she was a little girl, and she was ma wife, an' Ah lubbed her—Ah lubbed Belle.

"ONE night Ah waked up suddent as if someone had laid a han' on me. De dawn was all pinky outside. Belle was fas' asleep beside me, an' dat was de firs' time fo' a long time dat Ah seen her face when her eyes wasn't open an' Ah dared look at it good. Ah saw de curve of her neck against de white piller. Den de light grew mo', an' Ah saw ma own two han's lyin' dere on de white bed kiver. . . ."

He held up his black, pawlike hands to the light. The wind ballooned out the rose-colored drapes.

"Den all of a suddent Ah seemed to hear jus' as if a voice spoke it—but Ah knew dere weren't nobody sayin' it: 'Han's, yo' gwine to kill.'

"After dat, all de time, Ah was 'fraid. Ah was 'fraid in de daytime but mos' Ah was 'fraid at night. Ah'd wake plumb 'wake at dawn an' Ah'd lie dere watchin' her—an' dat voice, always mo' an mo' urgin', would say, 'Do it, Rath. Den *It* will die, too—an' nobody won't know what yo' thinkin' no mo'.'

"Oh, boss, dose days Ah jus' felt as if dey was a piece of glass set inter ma fo'head an' eberythin' Ah thought can be seen plain as plain can be! Boss, yo' don' know what a awful feelin' it can git to be to live wif someone all de time an' know, no matter how dey tries to hide it, dey knows eberythin' yo' think. But, Boss, Ah fought dat wicked thought fo' all Ah was worth. Ah sometimes see you lookin' at me in de Chinese restaurant as if yo' guessed some worriment was gnawin' on me."

His voice lowered to a whisper.

"But day after day seems like dat thought of killin' Belle jus' grew. Once Ah had a dream. Ah felt ma fingers hardin' up together like a vise 'roun' her throat. Ah woke up in a col' sweat an ma han's *was* in jus' dat position but only de bed clos' was between dem. Den Belle woke up suddently an' flash her big brown eyes at me in de dawn. Ah turned an' preten' Ah was 'sleep. But Ah didn't sleep none. Ah wondered if she *knew!* If *It* knew!

"Well, Ah jus' naturally didn't seem good fo' nothin', all dis goin' on inside me. Ah couldn't eat an' Ah couldn't sleep. . . .

"Our money pretty soon give out. Ah got daid broke. Had to go back to de high pitch 'gain. Dat night you came to de show, boss, she done it 'gain fo' de firs' time since we opened. Seem like Ah heard dat funny li'l laugh—an' Ah turned dizzy an' sick. Den yo' put out yo' han' an' touch me.

"After dat, seems like Ah hardly knew what Ah was doin' no mo'—or if it was Belle or dat *thing* lookin' out at me from her eyes dat knowed eberything. All las' week, boss, Ah was kinder wild inside like a animal in a trap. Once Ah foun' mahself whisperin' at ma han's: 'Han's, yo' gwine to kill.'

"Den, boss, dis mornin' Ah *knowed!* . . ."

His voice sank lower.

"Ah knowed Ah had to do it! Ah knowed dere weren't no escape fo' me!"

My eyes followed his; his were staring down at his two great, heavy black paws.

A gust of wind rattled the windows. The poorly latched bedroom door blew a little open.

Rath leaped from his chair with a scream. I, too, leaped up. I ran into the bedroom.

On the white counterpane of the bed, dimly lit by the rain-washed light of the east windows, the figure of Belle, the yellow girl, lay. She was fully dressed, nicely dressed, her hair prettily fixed. I raised her right arm which was hanging over the bed and placed it across her breast.

I heard a noise. Rath was standing in the door.

I opened the neck of her blouse—but her throat was clear, smooth, brown. No finger marks marred it.

"How did you—kill her?" I whispered.

But his tortured eyes understood nothing.

"Belle," he said, "Belle . . . baby." He seemed to be calling to her. "Belle . . . baby."

"Rath—I'm going out to telephone the police. I must, you understand."

He turned his wild, black eyes on me.

"O Lawdy . . . O God, she's daid. . . . O honey, you is daid! You is daid!"

He raised his huge hands above his head and brought them together with open palms like cymbals.

"O honey, you is daid."

His movements became more and more jerky. I saw with horror that the jerkiness was attaining a sort of jazz rhythm. He clapped his hands together unconsciously at intervals. His feet rose and fell in a sort of unconscious jazz-agony. He was going back, back into the thick forest, back before some huge, ring-lipped god—back into Africa. He was dancing with the sound of the wind and the rain to Belle, the mulatto girl. He was dancing the dance of agony, the primitive, naked dance of agony—the horrible, stiff syncopation of pain. . . .

"O honey, you is daid—you is daid!"

I could not bear to look at that naked dark spirit.

I bent over the girl to draw her left hand from under a fold of her dress so that both hands might be clasped together on her breast. I felt the thin yellow fingers of this hand gripped tightly around something. I bent lower. It was a small bottle, a triangular bottle. Then I gradually made out, on the torn label, part of a skull and cross-bones.

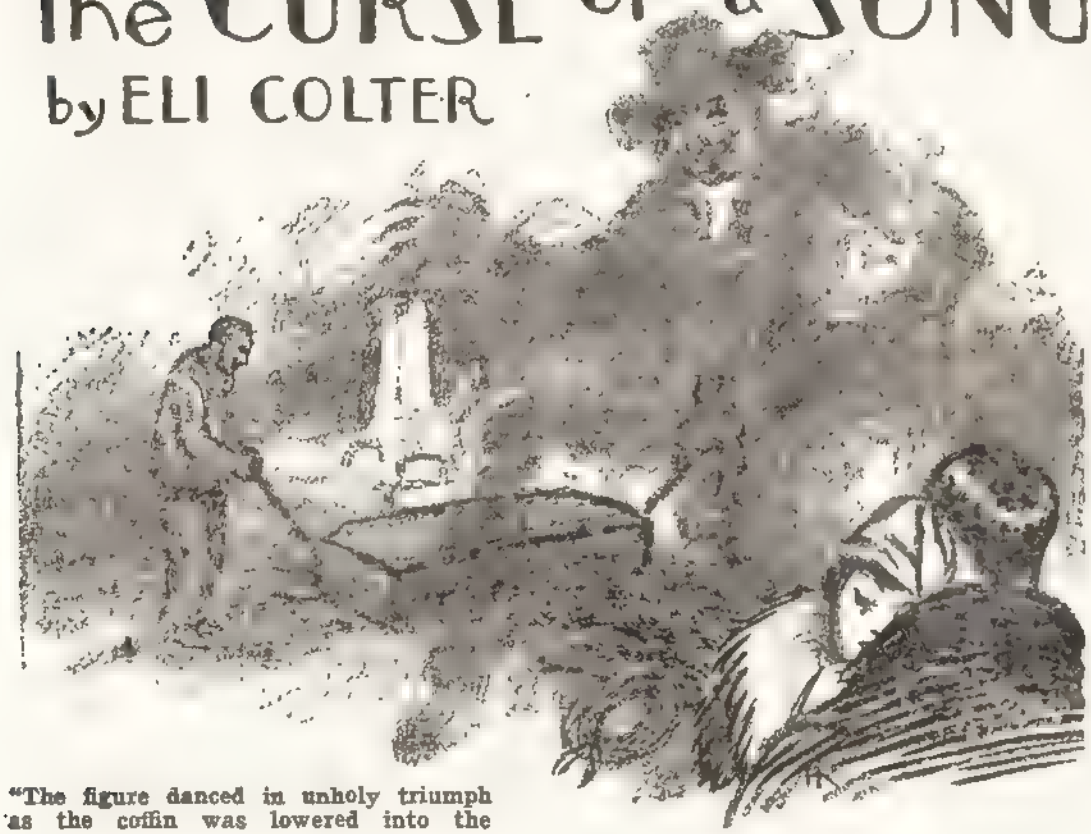
I looked slowly up at Rath.

Something in my glance penetrated to his consciousness.

"Yeh," he whispered. "She done it firs'. She *knowed*. She saved me."

The CURSE of a SONG

by ELI COLTER



"The figure danced in unholy triumph as the coffin was lowered into the ground."

"HE SAID the damned thing was cursed." Armitage threw back his head and laughed. The laugh held as much of contempt as it did of amusement. "I wonder if he thinks anyone is superstitious enough to believe in such antediluvian stuff as curses in this hectic era?"

"Oh, you don't believe in curses, eh?" Morgenthaler tapped the coal in his pipe and fixed a speculative gaze on Armitage.

"Huh? What's that? Believe in *curses?*" Armitage sobered slightly, returning Morgenthaler's gaze with surprize for the other man's serious tone. "Certainly not! Save the kind in which I indulge when I kick my shin on the rocking-chair in the dark. The other kind are the quintessence of absurdity. Hank! Don't tell me you believe in curses!"

"I'm not telling you anything." Henry Morgenthaler drew deeply on his pipe and shrugged his shoulders, and the serious look in his eyes grew till his whole face was dark and somber with its reflection. "But I've seen things that leave me guessing—yet only to a certain extent. What I've seen and known didn't leave much room for guesswork."

"Well, I didn't mean to step on anybody's toes. If I offended some particular idea of yours, I beg pardon." Armitage settled back in his chair and lit a cigaret, his eyes still on Morgenthaler, surprized and puzzled. Morgenthaler was a hard-headed, practical sort of chap. "I've heard and read a lot of that stuff,

naturally. Curses, ghosts, and all that rot. But I always grinned up my sleeve, took it at face value and let it go at that. Certainly, I never put any credence in it."

"No, I never used to, either." Morgenthaler carefully knocked the dottle from his pipe and began refilling it. "I used to believe the same way you do. But I can't believe that way now.

"You've heard me speak of Rose Wilzen. You knew I'd met her out in Portland, Oregon, that six years I spent on the coast. And you've wondered why I never want to go back to the West. Well, Rose, and her curse, are the reason. Rose's whole life was overshadowed with tragedy and curse. From the first time I heard about it I ceased scoffing. Grant Wilzen, Rose's father, was born in the East. He had a brother named Thaddeus. They called him Thad. Thad was engaged to a girl back there in the Eastern town where the Wilzen family then lived. He was three years older than Grant.

"An old barnstorming troupe came through the town with an *Uncle Tom's Cabin* show. The fellow playing the rôle of Simon Legree was a young man of talent, much dissatisfied with his villain's part. He's climbed. You'd be startled if I told you who he is now in the theatrical world. He had become acquainted with Grant Wilzen the year before while Grant was away at a summer resort on his vacation. When the troupe came to the town the actor looked up Grant, and so got acquainted with Thad.

"Thad didn't like him. There was no particular reason for his dislike. Just one of those peculiar things nobody can explain. He simply didn't like him. And he liked him less when circumstances forced him to introduce the actor to his fiancée. The actor showed marked interest in the girl and called on her the next afternoon. Thad was furious, but he didn't say much. The troupe's stay lengthened to two weeks, and every day the actor called on Thad's girl. And still Thad kept his mouth shut.

"The middle of the second week, Thad was sent away on business to be gone for two days. He wasn't really much concerned over the affair. He felt certain that the girl would forget all about the actor the moment the show was gone. He went on his business trip rather glad of something to help the time pass. The day he got back, he went straight to her house. There was a little latticed window opening from the parlor on to the front lawn. Thad stepped up to the window and looked through the pane, hearing the sound of the organ, and intending to surprize her. He stopped still at what he saw and heard.

"The girl was seated at the organ, playing and singing *Love's Old Sweet Song.* The actor stood by with an arm over her shoulders, and just as she finished the song he said, 'Wonderful, my darling! So shall our lives be. A continued dream of *Love's Old Sweet Song,*' And the girl answered, 'Yes, my beloved. Yes. I am thine forever!'

"The very tone of the high-flown words should have been revealing to Thad Wilzen. But he was a man of volcanic, vindictive nature—jealous, hot-headed, easily roused to an unreasoning fury. He glared at them for a moment, whirled and rushed blindly down the street, found Grant and told him what had happened. Then, in spite of Grant's efforts to prevent any hasty action on his part, he rushed madly out of of town, swearing he would never come back—that none of them would ever see him again. 'His faith in women was broken, he didn't care what became of him,' and all that stuff.

"Grant went straight to the girl, demanded an explanation, and told her what had happened. She was

heart-broken, and she explained to Grant that the actor was coaching her in a scene for a play that the girls of her set were going to produce after the troupe left town. She had refrained from telling Thad because she wanted to surprize him by showing him how clever she was. Those girls were just like a bunch of kids, wanting to play circus after the circus is gone. They had become inoculated with the atmosphere of the theater, and with much high glee and enthusiasm had decided to put on a show of their own. It was merely a passing whim, a regular kid trick, and the actor had good-naturedly entered into the spirit of the thing. He was secretly coaching all the girls and fellows, not only Thad's fiancée. He was a very decent chap, and he was aghast when the girl told him about Thad's misunderstanding of what he had seen, and of his rash action.

"They did everything they could to locate Thad, and the actor left the town with his troupe the next week, expressing deep and sincere regret, saying he was certain they would find Thad and everything would be all right. But they didn't find Thad. He had simply disappeared. Two years passed. The girl married another man. Grant got an opportunity to go to the West, where he had always wanted to go, and he went out to Portland, Oregon.

"At that time—it was some forty years ago—Portland was vastly different from the metropolis it is now. There were no big steel bridges over the wide Willamette River running through the center of the town. The city was still young, in its making. You had to cross the river on either the Jefferson Street or the Stark Street ferry. There was only one street-car in the town—a horse-drawn 'bob-car' running up and down Front Street along the west side of the river.

"Grant was delighted with the place. He wanted to grow up with it. He went to work, accumulated a circle of friends and set himself to carve out his future. But he thought he was missing something if he didn't see all of it. One night he went on a curiosity-impelled excursion with some boon companions into the then terrible North End. They roamed around through the joints, and rambled along through a couple of wide-open 'music halls' and saloons called by the names of the proprietors—Erickson's and Blazier's. Then they went on to the smaller dives, and in one wild place Grant ran bang-up into his brother Thad. Thad, neither drunk nor wild, was standing around watching the poor devils about him with a kind of cynical sympathy.

"AFTER he recovered from his first astonishment, Grant went close to him, took his brother by the arm and spoke to him.

"'Thad! Where have you been all this time?'

"'Thad?' His brother frowned in polite and distant bewilderment. 'You must be mistaken. My name is John Rogers.'

"Grant saw instantly that Thad wasn't running any bluff. He never learned how it happened, but Thad's mind had gone God knows where, and some stranger mind was in its place. Grant tried to make him remember who he was, but failed utterly. Then he tried to make friends with him, but only partly succeeded. Thad refused to go to live with him. He hung around the North End, gambling incessantly, looking on, never drinking, but never content anywhere else.

"One night when Grant was roaming around with him, trying to win his confidence and striving to bring back something of the past to Thad's mind, they went into a stinking little hell-hole of a music hall. There was a drunkard in there, seated at a

wheezy old organ in the corner, maudlinly playing and singing *Love's Old Sweet Song.* And something of what Grant had utterly failed to do was accomplished in a split second by that melody. Thad remembered. He stopped short, stared at the man, went white as a sheet and began to shake from head to foot. His stare turned into a maniacal glare; he pulled out a gun and emptied it into the body of the man at the organ.

"The place was instantly in an uproar. Some rushed to pick up the dead man, and others rushed at Thad. Grant managed to get his brother out of the place and away from the North End.

"From then on a curious thing came to pass. Concerning some things, Thad was as level-headed and cool as you could want a man to be. He knew who he was, knew Grant, and remembered most of the past. But just mention *Love's Old Sweet Song,* or let him hear a strain of it, and he was instantly a raving maniac. His insanity was so apparent that there was no talk of sending him to the gallows.

"He was immediately committed to the insane asylum, then situated in Portland on Twelfth and Hawthorne Streets. It was not at that time a state institution, but a private one kept by Dr. Hawthorne, who had built it on his own property and who ran it for the good of the state. There Thad was taken, and there Grant went often to see him, always hoping to find him improved and perhaps in time turned sane. But Thad never changed, except to grow worse. He remembered enough of the incident concerning the girl and the actor to send him into a murderous fury every time she was mentioned, or every time he thought of her or the song. Grant never mentioned either, but he couldn't keep Thad from thinking. Because Grant was with him at the time his memory partly returned, and because the song was so important a part of the shooting affair, Thad began to associate Grant with all his troubles. Every time Grant went to see him he would go into a rage and begin to curse him. He kept steadily getting worse to such an extent that Grant had to stay away.

"Then Grant got married, and for two years he didn't see Thad. And Thad went into another rage, in which he was plainly dying. They sent for Grant. Thad had cooled down in the meantime and become more lucid and calm than he had been since his incarceration in the asylum. But the moment he saw Grant he went again into a wild fury. He had been told of Grant's marriage. He cursed Grant, his wife, and all of his descendants. He swore that after he died he would come back and curse him so long as he lived, if he ever dared have that song around him or allowed it played in his house. He died repeating that curse over and over.

"GRANT, of course, grieved over it. But he was humanely relieved to see Thad out of his troubles, and he paid no attention to the curse. He laughed at it, as you and I would have done, Armitage. For the next few years life moved along smoothly for him, and he about forgot Thad's curse. But he had told his wife about it, and she was just superstitious enough so that she wouldn't have the song in the house, and she wouldn't let anyone sing it or play it on their organ.

"Grant's family began to come, and he had bought himself a place in the town of Lents—then a separate town but since a suburb of Portland. Grant prospered. Portland had grown. Three big steel bridges, the Morrison, Steel, and Burnside, had gone up over the river. Street-cars were running on both sides of the Willamette. And as the town grew, Grant grew up with it. He had got

to be pretty well off, and was feeling well satisfied with life.

"The tragedy of Thad was legend in the family, but none save Grant's wife put any credence in the curse the insane man had leveled at them all. Rose, the youngest of Grant's children, a sensitive, delicate child, grew up with the shadow of that curse hanging over her. She couldn't tell why, but she had an instinctive, uncontrollable belief in it. The asylum had been taken over by the state, and the inmates moved to the state institution at Salem. But the old private asylum remained there on Hawthorne's property for a long time, on the bank of a little creek, empty and deserted. She saw it once, when she was a little kid, and it made a powerful impression on her mind.

"The other children of the family sighed in perfunctory sympathy and shrugged away from them their Uncle Thad's tragedy, although they were oddly careful to avoid any contact with that song. But Rose couldn't shake it off so easily. Nor could she ever get out of her head the inner picture of the gloomy old asylum. It grew to shadow her. She couldn't get away from it. By the time she was eighteen her entire existence was colored by a dread belief in the curse bound up in *Love's Old Sweet Song*. Whenever she would even think of it she would remember the gloomy old asylum, and shiver. The building had been torn down, the creek filled in, and concrete streets heavy with traffic now ran over its site. But to Rose it still stood, a sinister monument of the wreck of Thad's life and the curse of a song.

"When she was nineteen years old she could look back and count seven different tragical happenings that had occurred in connection with that song. Her belief in the curse was so implicit that no one could make her believe other than that to sing it or hear it was disaster.

"Then she met Murray Fielding. He was just back from the war. We were attending a party at the home of one of her friends. I had taken her there. Long since I had made my try for her affections, and lost. But, contrary to commonly accepted opinion on that subject, we remained fast friends. Well, we arrived at her friend's house, and her friend's brother and I stood in the hall talking, waiting for her. She and her friend had gone upstairs to the friend's room where she was to leave her wraps.

"I heard her voice, and turned to see her coming down the stairs arm in arm with the other girl. The girl was telling Rose about Murray Fielding, how fine-looking he was, what a nice fellow, you know—came of a splendid family, was decorated in the war, and all the things girls say about men when they want to interest another girl. I grinned up at them. They were about half-way down the stairs and they were making no effort to lower their voices.

"Just then Murray himself came into the hall, paused by the table where the punch-bowl stood, and began to ladle out a glassful of punch. Rose's friend hailed him gayly. He looked up, smiled at her, and his glance passed to Rose. Just at that precise moment three or four of the girls in the room beyond began to bang on the piano and sing *Love's Old Sweet Song*.

"I started, and shot a glance at Rose. She went white, and stopped short on the stairs, staring at Murray Fielding. Because, in that instant, she knew that Murray was the one man for whom she was intended. And she heard the wailing of that song behind him. He put down the ladle and glass he held, staring back at her, puzzled and amazed by the look on her face and the pallor, knowing also that she was the one girl for him. Rose's friend knew all about the curse, and even had a kind of ro-

mantic respect for it. But she didn't believe in it. She took Rose by the arm, drew her on down into the hall and introduced Murray Fielding to her.

"For the next three months Rose and Murray went through a strange experience. They couldn't bear to be apart, and they were miserable when they were together. Rose was frightened out of her wits. Murray was entirely at sea, bewildered and puzzled by her actions. She hadn't told him about the curse, and she had forbidden anyone else's doing so. Up to that time I had treated the whole thing as a joke, only that I deplored what I considered Rose's foolish belief in it. But now I began to be worried about the thing. I could see that Rose was wearing down under severe strain, and one night I deliberately brought up the subject, intending to try and talk her out of it.

" 'It's no use, Hank,' she told me, her face colorless and her eyes dilated with apprehension. 'I know you laugh at it, but that curse is very real. Uncle Thad hangs around me all the time. I don't know what he wants, but he intends to carry out that curse so long as any of us live.'

" 'He hangs around you?' I repeated, staring at her, wondering if she was a little bit unsettled in her mind from brooding over it. 'See here, my dear, that's all bunk. When a man's dead, he's dead.'

" 'You may think so,' she answered, shaking her head, 'but you're wrong. Twice in the last month I've seen him, but I've been afraid to tell anybody but you. They'd only laugh at me. I know *you* won't.'

" 'No, I won't laugh at you,' I said soberly, studying her face, noting the dark circles under her eyes and the drawn look about her mouth. 'What do you mean—you've seen him?'

" 'Why, just that.' She sank into a chair, and as I walked over to sit beside her she went white, put her hand over her mouth to stopper a scream, and pointed behind me with a shaking finger. 'He follows me, I tell you! There he is, now!'

"I wheeled and stared across the room where she pointed. For a moment I didn't see anything. Then I saw a shadow pass along the wall. It was exactly like the shadow of some person cast by the sun, on the clear blue-gray tone of the solid-colored paper. I started to say that someone must have come up on the porch, that the sun had thrown the shadow there. Then I realized with a start that the sun was shining from the other direction—that had the shadow been a normal one it would have appeared on the *opposite* wall. That stopped me.

"I STOOD there staring at that slowly moving shadow, telling myself that it was some ghastly hoax. A ghost in broad daylight! Nonsense. But I couldn't make myself believe it was nonsense. That damned shadow was too clearly outlined. It was the shadow of a man a little above average height, in profile, showing a lean figure, a thin mouth-line and a long hooked nose. And it was moving. When it got within four feet of Rose it stopped. A queer kind of smoky light grew around the edges of it and it began to assume rounded proportions. It took on a color of flesh, and the face became fairly clear.

"And of all the faces I ever saw! It was positively diabolical in expression. The glaring, maniacal eyes glued to Rose's face. The thin mouth twisted in a hideous sneer. It was horrible, menacing, gloating. I felt a chill go over me and the hair raised on my scalp. The whole room was filled with a dank, foul odor, as though something loathsome and putrefying had been injected into the atmosphere. The very sunlight streaming through the window seemed polluted and soiled. I was frozen. I

couldn't move. Then, as quickly as he had come, he was gone.

"I got a grip on myself and turned to Rose. She was all but frightened into a faint, and I didn't for one moment try to conceal the fact that I myself was badly shaken.

" 'You saw him?' she gasped.

" 'Yes, I saw him, damn him!' I answered harshly. I took her cold hand and gripped it tightly. My own wasn't much warmer. 'Why in thunder is he following you about in that way? What's he up to?' I had no scoffing defense left. He had been there and that's all there was to it. I knew what I had seen. Then, before she could answer, my own reason explained it partly. I summed it up to Rose. 'He knows you're the only one in the family who has really taken him seriously. The very unbelief of the others held him off and rendered his power impotent. The three boys have all married and gone away without anything happening to them, you'll notice. Nothing ever happened to your father—save your mother's death, and *he* couldn't have been connected with that.'

'He was,' Rose interrupted, shivering and clinging to my hand. 'He was! You don't know all about this thing, Hank. Mother was getting better—and some crazy Italian came along the street playing a hand-organ. And of all things on earth he was playing that hideous song! And Mother heard it, and she cried out in a kind of terror, as if she saw something at the foot of her bed. She shrank back on her pillow and died in the instant. All of them stared toward the foot of her bed, and though they saw nothing, they remembered the curse, and they were secretly startled and shaken. But I—I saw. I saw that shadow—for the first time.'

" 'Exactly!' I put in, getting some control of my shaken faculties in my eager following out of the hypothesis I had formulated. '*You* saw him! No one else did. Your very belief in him has given him power to reach you.'

" 'Yes, and his power is growing.' Rose shivered uncontrollably and clung to me like a child afraid of the dark. 'And I'm so fearful of the future that it's breaking my nerve. I don't know what to do.'

"I didn't know what to do either. I didn't know what to suggest. All my preconceived ideas of such things were knocked into a cocked hat, utterly shattered by the proof lately put before me. I couldn't shake off the feeling of dread that had descended on me. I couldn't get rid of the picture of that hideous, leering, rage-contorted face. I couldn't smell anything but that putrid, foul odor he had brought with him. I stayed around for over an hour, trying to calm her and persuade her that the problem could be worked out somehow. But I made a rather poor job of it because I was so upset myself, and I had no idea what might be ahead of her if that fiend were not stopped in some way.

"I left the house, finally, and walked the streets for another hour, trying to think, and not making much headway with that, either. There was no doubt about it. Thad had come back, all right, if he had ever left the family in the first place. And he had fastened himself on the one member of the family who was approachable by him. What he intended there was no way to hazard an opinion. But it was something ugly and horrible, and he would succeed in it all right—if someone didn't find the means of stopping him.

"THAT week the crowd of young people with which Rose associated took a sudden idea into their heads to make up a party and go to Mount Hood for the week-end. Mount Hood is a magnificent snow peak, 11,225 feet in elevation, some fifty or sixty miles from Portland.

All the girls of the crowd were jeering at me because I had never been even so far as Government Camp. They begged me to come along on this week-end trip, and although I didn't care to get that far away from Rose, I did feel a desire to see the place for its historic significance.

"I wanted to see the beauty of the mountain, and I had a desire to look at the monument erected there by the Sons and Daughters of Oregon Pioneers—the monument dedicated to Samuel Barlow, pioneer from Kentucky, who built the first wagon road across the Cascade Mountains, passing that spot at the base of Mount Hood somewhere in 1845 to '46, enabling other wagon-train immigrants to have direct ingress to the Willamette Valley. But though I knew how much there was to see up there, I refused to go till I found that Rose and Murray had finally agreed to trail along. Then I consented in double-quick time.

"The party was bound for a cottage, owned by one of the girls' parents, and built a little way this side of Government Camp, in the big firs. The camp was then the end of the road, or nearly so. That was long before the cement highway was built to form the loop around Hood. The girls thought it would be no end of a lark to go up there on Saturday, take a trip a little way up the mountain, and come back on Sunday.

"Well, of course we started out in fine spirits. I hadn't heard the curse-bearing song since that night of the party three months before. If it had been a favorite with the gang, it wouldn't have seemed so strange a thing for it to crop up that night. But it wasn't. The girls didn't like it. They voted it sloppy and slow. They couldn't understand what motive had impelled them to tear into it right at that moment. I know. I asked them. And why should they take a freak notion to take a bust at it at the precise instant when Rose first laid eyes on Murray Fielding? I never have believed in coincidence. I guess I was the only one in that gay crowd that Saturday evening who had the shivers under the grin I wore to mask my feelings. I was thinking of all the affairs, and mostly of Thad's appearance.

"Murray's presence had steadied Rose a great deal, and the rest of the crowd was so hilarious that they drew her into their nonsense in spite of herself. We started from Portland early, but the roads were bad, and we struck one nasty detour that forced us to crawl along at five miles in low. At Rose's request I had gone in Murray's car with him and her. He had a roadster that would barely accommodate the three of us. When we reached the detour, another party bound for the mountain drove up even with us and the cars got all mixed up. The rest of our party got away ahead of us, but Murray didn't pay any attention.

"I noticed that he was watching the side roads; a few of them showed up here and there, rutted and almost impassable, and he was keeping a careful eye on them. Finally he stopped at one of them, turned down it, and crawled along through the timber on miserable going. I wondered what he was up to, but I kept my mouth shut and attended to my own business. Murray was a fine, keen, level-headed chap, and I knew that whatever he was doing was all right. He finally drew up before a dark, remote and hidden cabin. Still, I didn't say a word. And neither did he. And neither did Rose. He got out of the car, assisted her out and started toward the cabin with a beckoning gesture for me. Of course I followed close.

"The cabin was locked, but he took out a key, opened the door, preceded us in and struck a match to light the oil lamp sitting on the table. It had grown dusky early there in the shadow of the trees. I don't know

to this day whether he simply accepted me as someone close enough to Rose to be trusted all the way, or whether he was driven so hard he didn't give a whoop who was around. At all events he turned and faced Rose, ignoring me utterly, and asked bluntly, 'Rose, just why are you afraid of me?'

"'I'm—I'm not,' she denied, but she went white as paper and I felt the cold chills go up and down my spine. In a passing car on the not distant detour I could faintly hear a band of celebrators singing *Love's Old Sweet Song*. And squarely behind Murray on the wall appeared that malignant shadow.

"Murray set his mouth grimly as Rose dropped into a chair, too much frightened to keep her feet, and answered with terse words, 'Rose, you can't expect me to believe that weak denial. Why, you're as white as a death's-head at the very question!'

"He was shaking with emotion, and I felt infinitely sorry for him, but I couldn't tear my eyes from that hideous shadow on the wall. It wasn't moving now—it was standing still directly behind him. He went on harshly, 'I'd swear you care as much for me as I do for you. I've seen it in your eyes, if I'm any judge of human beings at all. Yet, every time I come close to you, you shudder. You shuddered and went white the first time you ever saw me. What is it? What have I done? What do you think I've done? I swear I've never committed any act in my life of which I need be ashamed. I've not even any relative of which I need be ashamed. As a matter of fact, I've no living relative at all save a half-brother from whom I became separated during the war. I never could find him again, never expect to see him again. But he was one of the finest chaps I ever knew, and I'd give ten years of my life to find him. What is it, Rose? You've got to tell me. Your treatment of me is driving me mad!'

"*Mad.* Ugly word. Driving him mad! Rose's eyes dilated terribly as she stared at the shadow taking shape behind him, and the voices from that car crawling along the detour still faintly wafted that cursed song down to us.

"Rose half got up from her chair, driven beyond control, and cried out at him, 'Murray—listen—what do you hear?' He strained his ears for the least sound, and caught the echo of that song, as Rose finished wildly, 'Look behind you! Murray—look behind you!'

"Murray wheeled, and stared where her gaze was riveted. The shadow had completely taken form by this time, and he saw clearly, as we saw, that horrible, sinister figure, with the thin cruel mouth and the glaring mad eyes. As he looked, the thin mouth opened, twisting, writhing, and I knew Thad Wilzen was trying to speak to him. But his power hadn't grown strong enough for that yet, and no sound came from the menacing, diabolical shape. Murray stared a moment, then his face went black with anger. He thought it was a real corporeal fleshly body standing there.

"'Get out of here!' he roared, jerking out the little automatic he habitually carried in defiance of all laws to the contrary, leveling the snub-nosed wicked weapon at the vicious figure he now faced. 'Get out of here, instantly, or I'll drill you!'

"Thad got out. But he didn't go through any fear of Murray, nor because Murray had commanded it. He did it to put the fear into Murray's heart, and he succeeded. He laughed—and we heard that. A thin, high, mocking titter. The glare in his eyes shot an ugly threat at Rose, his whole figure wavered, grew thin and vanished into the air. Oh, he went, all right. And there was no mistaking the *way* he went, either! Murray

stared a moment at the blank wall, his eyes starting from his head, then he turned slowly, replacing the gun in his pocket, shifting his stare to Rose's white face.

"'Good God!' he cried hoarsely; 'what was that? Rose, what does it mean? What's back of all this?'

"'That—that song——' Rose gasped, and fainted in her chair.

"Both of us sprang toward her, but he reached her first. He picked her up in his arms, took the chair himself, and sat there rocking her in his arms like a baby, staring down into her colorless face, smoothing her forehead with one hand.

"'She'll come about all right in a moment,' I said, trying to speak calmly. 'I know the whole affair. Better let me tell you before she comes out of her faint. She's merely frightened.'

"Murray looked up at me with a start, suddenly recalled to the fact of my presence. The shock and bewilderment on his face settled a little, and he asked in a steadier voice, though still hoarse and shaken, 'You—you saw it, Hank? You smelled that vile odor? I thought at first that the cabin was just musty from being closed so long. It's our summer house, you know. The folks haven't been up since last year—the folks where I stay. They have made me one of the family. They're all the folks I have. But Rose saw it. You—did you——?'

"'Certainly I saw him,' I cut in. 'I've seen him before. If you'll give me just a minute or two I'll explain to you.' And I did so, rapidly and briefly.

"He listened silently, sitting there and rocking Rose in his arms, and she looked so white and still that it gave me the shivers just to glance at her. 'I don't know how in God's name it will end,' I finished, 'but we've got to fight the thing out somehow. Rose has managed to keep it from you all along. She feared if you learned of it, and believed in it, it would give him power over you, too. But you had to know, and I'm glad it's come about this way. We've got to figure out some way of stopping him before he literally frightens her to death. I'm certain that's what he's trying to do. He's violently, unreasoningly bitter against Grant, her father. She's all Grant has left. The boys are all married, as you know, and none of them nearer than Canada. Rose's mother is dead. You see what a keen revenge he'll have against Grant if he can bring tragedy on Rose. Rose was always her father's favorite, anyway.'

"'There's just one thing I want to know,' Murray said tensely. 'Not that it will make any difference in my fighting for her so long as there's any fight left. But I've got to know whether or not Rose cares for me. I can't stand the suspense any longer. I've got to know.'

"'She loves you better than anything in the world,' I said steadily, and I had good cause to be sure of that. 'You can feel absolutely settled about it. All you've got to do is help us plan some campaign against that ghoul that threatens her.'

"Rose stirred in his arms, and he turned his entire attention to her, swiftly, looking anxiously into her eyes as she opened them and stared up into his face.

"'Are you all right, Rose? You've got to be! Hank and I are going to see this through somehow. Can't you buck up a bit, and trust us to manage to find the way to foil him—whatever he intends doing? Just so surely as we three are here on the bank of the Salmon River, I tell you there is a way, and Hank and I will find it.'

"'If you could!' Rose shuddered and leaned wearily against his shoulder. 'I am—am so afraid! I don't feel like going on to Mount Hood.'

"'We don't need to go on,' Murray answered, glancing up at me. 'I couldn't go on myself without knowing just how matters stood between you and me. That's why I stopped off here. I intended stopping here when we started from Portland. We'll turn around and go back, if you wish.'

"'Yes—I'd rather. It's all right with you, Hank?' She looked up to catch my vehement nod of assent, and went on talking to Murray. 'I'm too much frightened to think clearly, or to bear the nonsense of the crowd tonight and tomorrow. Maybe Hank has told you—that song has spelled tragedy for me all my life.'

"Murray nodded, and she got to her feet with his aid, white and weary till it cut my heart to look at her. 'Well, there's no good going over it, then. You know. And the moment I saw you on the stairs that first time—those crazy youngsters began singing that awful song. Why, have you ever stopped to think what the initial letters of the horrible thing spell? L—o—s—s, loss! What are we going to do? He—he's getting closer. I feel him more powerful and hideous all the time.' She shuddered and stopped for sheer lack of breath.

"'I don't'—Murray started to speak, hesitated, then went on grimly —'I don't know what we're going to do. But we're going to do something, never doubt that. Rose—are you afraid to marry me with that thing hanging over?'

"'Oh——!' She started, shrank back, then stumbled on: 'Yes—I—I am. I'm afraid to do that—and I'm afraid to let you go.'

"'You're not letting me go,' Murray returned curtly. 'It can't be done. I'm yours for good, and if he stops us he's got a big job on his hands!'

"'Let's get back to Portland,' I said abruptly. 'I don't think any of us feels much like mingling with a picnic crowd.'

"Murray nodded, handed me his flashlight and motioned toward the door as he went to the table to blow out the lamp. I snapped on the flash and lit the three of us out, and none of us spoke again till we were in the car and headed back for Portland. As a matter of fact, little was said at all on the way back to town. We rode in a strained silence, too much shaken for further speech, busy with ghastly thoughts, and the remembrance of Thad's appearance in the cabin. We left Rose at her front door, and didn't drive on till we saw the lights go up inside the house. Then we drove away, and Murray asked me to spend the night with him.

"I was rather glad to accept that invitation. I knew his thoughts were the same as mine. Knew that he had the idea of our getting together with all possible haste.

"THE people with whom he stayed were all abed and the house dark, and we went up to his room with as little disturbance as possible. But not to sleep. We never even removed our clothes. For a while we didn't even talk. Murray switched on the light, and we sat around and paced the room, alternately. Then suddenly Murray wheeled to face me with a queer light in his eyes.

"'Listen here, Hank. I've got an idea. I don't know that song. Never even read it through. But one of the girls here has a book of old home and college songs that's bound to contain it. I'm going to get it.'

"He went out of the room abruptly, and I paced back and forth awaiting his return, wondering what kind of scheme he had in his head. He was back shortly, carrying the book spread open to the song.

"'Look here, Hank. Read it,' he said, and held the book out to me.

"Neither had I ever read the song through, and I took it in my hands with a kind of grisly interest, seeing in my mind's eye again the thin ma-

lignant face of Thad Wilzen. I went through the two stanzas word by word:

Once in the dear dead days beyond recall,
When on the world a mist began to fall,
Out of the dreams that rose in happy throng,
Lo, to our hearts love sang an old, sweet song;
And through the dusk, where fell the fire-light's gleam,
Softly it wove itself into our dream.

Even today we hear love's song of yore,
Deep in our hearts it dwells forever more,
Footsteps may falter, weary grow the way,
Yet we can hear it at the close of day;
So to the end, when life's dim shadows fall,
Love shall be found the sweetest song of all.

Chorus

Just a song at twilight, when the lights are low,
And the flick'ring shadows softly come and go;
Though the heart be weary, sad the day and long,
Still to us at twilight comes love's old song—
Comes love's old, sweet song.

" 'Exquisite,' Murray breathed. 'I never realized before how lovely the old thing is, set to that haunting music. And he's trying to make of it a hideous, horror-ridden symbol of tragedy. Trying to frighten the life out of Rose through one of the most glorious melodies, written on a glorious theme. Well, I think I've discovered the way to stop him. I—damn him! Look!'

"I whirled to look toward the doorway, where Murray's gaze had flashed. There was the shadow, materializing as though it had just come through the door. And as we stared, it assumed full shape quickly, and Thad stood there pointing at the open book, glaring malevolently at Murray, mouthing furiously and striving to speak so that we could hear. But only one word could we get—the word 'Rose.' Murray hurled the book at him furiously, his face white with rage. Thad went out exactly as he had gone from the cabin. And again that high, thin, tittering laugh trailed in the air as he disappeared.

"Murray sprang across the room, picked up the book and whirled to face me. I asked him what his idea was, but he shook his head, dumb with anger and fear for Rose, with a shaking realization of what a futile-seeming battle was ahead of us, fighting a ghoul that could laugh and fade out on the wall like a shadow. He finally told me he would explain to Rose and me together, and began pacing the floor like a madman. I slumped into a chair, staring at him, and slowly it grew in my mind exactly what Thad intended. If he could frighten Rose to death and send Murray insane, he would accomplish his hideous design. He knew too well how utterly that would break Grant Wilzen. And as though in affirmation to my thought I heard again his high, tittering laugh.

"Both Murray and I were about half mad when the night had finally worn away and the morning was late enough for us to go over to the Wilzen house. Rose let us in with a sigh of relief, and we saw from the weariness on her face that she had slept little. Murray asked after her father, and she said he had gone out for a drive with some friends up the Columbia River Highway. He had gone before she was up, surprized to find her returned when he thought she had gone out to Mount Hood. He left a note saying he wouldn't have gone if he'd known she was to be home, but he'd already given his word and didn't want to disappoint the men with whom he was going.

"Rose led us on into the living-room, and Murray followed her to the divan and sat down by her side. I dropped into a chair across from them, and he pulled from his pocket that book, and spread it open to the song. One hand on the page, he looked intently into her eyes and asked, 'Rose, how do you kill a leech?'

" 'Why'—Rose frowned, puzzled—'I—I don't know.'

" 'You stick a knife into it,' Murray answered tersely. 'Stick a knife into it and let the blood out. The thing that hangs over you is a leech, menacing, striving to sap your life of happiness till it will leave nothing but a drained husk in its wake. It—he, that crazed fiend of yours, is trying to frighten you to death and drive me mad.' I caught my breath. I hadn't thought he'd got it, too. He went on swiftly, 'He's a leech, hanging onto you like death. And we're going to stick a knife into him! You and I love each other too much to be licked by a thing like this. We're starting a line of active defense, right now! See here!'

"He lifted his hand from the page and held out the book. Rose saw the song to which the page was opened, shivered and shrank back. He got up, walked over to the piano and spread the book open on the music rack, then turned and walked back to her.

" 'We're going to show him!' he said sharply, taking her hand and drawing her to her feet. 'He can't hang anything on us like that with that lovely old song. I want you to sit down there and sing it and play it from beginning to end. And we're going to keep right on singing it, and repeating it, day after day, till we drive him out of our reckoning by the very force we set up against him. For every note you play and every word you sing, Hank and I will shoot out every ounce of will we possess to make of it a blessing instead of a curse. We'll stick a knife into that damnable leech—we'll drain him of every ounce of blood-power he possesses. Play it, Rose!'

"She shrank from it in abject terror, and Murray almost had to force her to the piano. But she did get there finally, and I sat dumb in my chair, looking on. She dropped on the piano bench as though her knees had buckled under her, and managed to command her fingers as she raised them to the keys. Only the iron dominance of Murray's will drove her on.

"The melody stumbled under her hands at first, and her voice wavered over the words. But the song grew clearer as she went on, and Murray stood close to her with his arm about her shoulder. And I shivered—and thought of Thad's girl. Then I had something else to shiver about. As she began the second stanza the shadow appeared on the wall. It writhed and danced in a blast of insane fury, and speedily grew to form the figure of Thad Wilzen. Murray was watching for it, and he whirled around, dropping his arm from about Rose's shoulder.

"She knew instinctively what had happened, and Murray shouted at her, 'Don't stop, Rose! Go on! *Go on!*' And he advanced two or three steps to face Thad, keeping between him and Rose. 'Get out!' he cried. 'Get out of here and stay out!—Come on, Hank—quick! Pit your will against him with mine!—Get out of here, you devil! That song is a blessing, a psalm to the most holy and God-given emotion on earth! You can't stand against it! Get out!'

"Rose's voice stumbled, caught, and wavered on, gaining strength as it approached the glorious close. I sprang to my feet and stood face to face with Thad, shoulder to shoulder with Murray, willing with all my might that the song should change from curse to blessing, that he should go down before it. We were two to one. The malignant, hideous face contorted and mouthed at us, and we advanced side by side toward him, striving to stare him down, to force him out of there. The closer to him we got the more revolting grew the putrid odor in our nostrils. And then, suddenly, as the song trembled to a finish, he was gone as quickly as light, leaving behind him only that horrible odor and the echo of his thin, high, tittering laugh.

"Murray wheeled around with a look of grim triumph on his white

face, and Rose swayed where she sat. Murray sprang to her, and she wilted limply on the bench, drooping against him.

" 'We got him that time,' Murray exulted, throwing an arm about Rose's shoulder. 'And we'll get him every time. We'll drum that song into his ears till he's sick of the sound of it. We'll drive him so far away he can't ever come back!'

" 'Oh—I'm afraid!' Rose sat up rigidly, clinging to Murray's hand on her shoulder. 'I'm afraid! I heard him laugh. There was something triumphant in it!'

"I felt a quiver of apprehension. I'd got that, too, and I saw by the look in Murray's eyes that it hadn't escaped him, either. But he wouldn't admit it to her. He sat down by her and talked incessantly for nearly a half-hour, exulting in what he felt certain was an initial victory, trying to calm her and banish her fears. He'd about succeeded and she was growing nearly normal again, when the 'phone rang. She got up to answer it, and we could both see her from where we sat, standing in the hall opposite the open door.

"She took down the receiver and answered, made a short reply to some question, stood listening a long minute, then cried out sharply and dropped the 'phone. Murray sprang toward her as she turned to face us, her features the color of a corpse. He caught her, and I went past them to replace the receiver on the hook, then rushed back into the room where he had taken her.

" 'Rose—what is it?' he was asking as I came through the door.

" 'Father——' Rose gasped. 'The call was from a house on the highway. The car—went over the bank—Father was driving. One of the men heard him cry out something like—Thad—then he twisted the wheel crazily—the car went over. All but one were killed.'

" 'Your father carried an identification card—saying to notify you in case of accident, didn't he?' I interrupted.

" 'Y-yes,' she nodded, her face strained and her haggard eyes filling with tears. 'It—it happened about half an hour ago. Oh—I told you he—he had triumph in that horrible laugh! Murray!' She turned to him and beat her hands against his arm. 'Don't ever defy him again!'

" 'I'm killing a leech!' Murray's voice was hard. 'He shan't have you! I'll drain him, and pound him and knock every ounce of power out of him! Or die in the attempt! Hank, my car's out front. You drive, will you?'

"I nodded, speechless, stunned before the swift comeback Thad had accomplished in answer to Murray's defiance. Murray helped Rose into her wraps, and we went out to get into the car and drive to the scene of the accident. Murray gave all his attention to Rose, and I drove in a kind of grim daze, but I could hear his low voice running along.

" 'The fight's on, Rose. I'm going to win, if you and Hank will just stick with me.'

"I was pretty sick inside, and I wasn't at all hopeful about the tactics he was pursuing, but I had no idea myself that was any better, and I determined I was certainly going to stick with them no matter what the end might be. We got out to the Highway, and came back with another bigger car, bringing her father's body with us. Two days later he was buried. Rose went through it all in a cold, numbed state that precluded tears and words. She took up life alone in the house, with a companion Murray hired to stay with her, an old Irishwoman who had sense enough to keep out of sight and sound when she wasn't wanted.

"But Murray never gave any quarter, never relaxed an inch in the fight he had begun. He had a professional

singer render that song at the funeral, and held Rose's head against his shoulder so that she couldn't see the figure of Thad literally dancing in unholy triumph as the coffin was lowered into the ground. Of course none but we three could have seen him, anyhow. And none but we three heard his tittering laugh of triumph as we turned away from the grave.

"AFTER that, Murray and I both spent with Rose every hour away from business. And every day he made her sing that song for him. And every day we went through the same old ghastly business of striving to will that song into a blessing, as Thad grimaced and threatened and filled us with a horrible fear we couldn't name or conquer. Inside of a week we were beginning to feel the wear of it. Murray was looking like a ghost himself, and Rose went around like a phantom. Murray began to carry a wild, fanatical light in his eyes, and I knew that Rose was sick with dread. But he wouldn't give up. He kept on with his mad campaign, and gradually I began to think I saw a change in Thad himself. Not that he was any the less furious at us.

"He grew more violent and threatening every time he appeared. And he appeared more quickly each time, now. The moment she struck the first notes of that song the shadow darkened the wall, and each time the shadow remained for less time a shadow and took on more swiftly the full outlines of the figure. Undoubtedly he was growing stronger. His laugh was clearer. Now and then we could catch clearly a word or two that he mouthed at us. And he was positively maniacal in his fury. But—it was the fury of a man *fighting* something tangible! Of a man who realizes that *he has something to fight!*

"We all saw that, and though the strain was terrific, a look of fanatical triumph and frantic suspense began to grow in Murray's eyes. Then the climax was on us before we realized it.

"Murray worked for a lumber company, and he was given orders to go down to Astoria, a little town about a hundred miles west on the Columbia River, to inspect some trees for the company. It seemed there was a tract there of heavily timbered land, and its owner had promised the president of the company that he would give him first chance at the timber in the event that he ever decided to sell it. The timber was of exceptional value. Murray was panic-stricken to think he must leave Portland right at that time, but his position with the company was important, and he was compelled to make the trip.

"The moment he told me he was forced to go, I felt a chill of apprehension. He was to be gone for a week. My fear of Thad's ultimate victory over Rose hadn't for a minute subsided. I marveled at her ability to keep going under that strain. It was wearing Murray and me both down. But the old Irishwoman said she slept like a baby at night—Murray had insisted that the old woman was to sleep right in Rose's room—and I think that was the only thing that helped her to carry on. She was sick with fear when she learned of Murray's coming absence. And the grimmest part of it was that Murray insisted that she was to keep singing that song, every night.

"'We've got him going,' he said, and I could see from his white face that he knew we were making our last stand against the powers of darkness. 'We can't let up now, or we're lost. You'll stick, Hank?' He turned to me, and I nodded in silent assent. He knew very well I'd stick. He turned back to Rose. 'Hank will be here right with you every minute he can spare. And I want you to sing that song every evening precisely at 8 o'clock. Your watch is steady, and so is mine. We'll set them together to the fraction of a second. I'll hear your voice

down there, as surely as I do here. And exactly at 8 o'clock, *wherever I am, no matter what I'm doing,* I'll stop and listen. I'll stop and set my mind with Hank's, against his. You'll —carry on, Rose?'

"I could see her shaking with fear, clear across the room, and her lips were stiff, but she was game to the core. She promised, and I knew she'd keep her promise no matter what it should cost. And Murray knew it also.

"He went to Astoria the following morning. He gave us his word to drop us a telegram every evening to let us know that he was all right and everything was going well. The timber land was near enough to town so that he could go in on one of the man's horses.

"And that night Rose sang the song for Murray, a hundred miles away. We sat there in the living-room, she in front of the piano on the bench, I standing by her, our eyes glued to the dial of her watch, waiting for the hands to reach 8 o'clock. On the precise instant she lifted her hands to the keys. I saw her fingers tremble, and her voice wavered, but she didn't falter for a moment. She'd hardly struck the first chord when Thad followed his hideous shadow and faced me across the room, menacing and horrible. I sprang between him and her, walking slowly toward him, and stopped within four feet of him, my nostrils smarting with the foul odor surrounding him, my will battling his as I held his mad, glaring eyes.

"It seemed an eternity that I stood there, straining every ounce of will and brain against him, till the song was done, and he was gone with that tittering, mocking laugh, and Rose fainted on the bench and slipped to the floor. I sprang to pick her up, and it took me twenty frantic minutes to bring her back to consciousness. She wasn't the hysterical type, or she'd have gone completely out of her head, then. As it was, it was more than an hour before I succeeded in calming her to any extent, and I was utterly shocked to see how thin she'd grown with the wear of the battle we waged. For all I could do, I accomplished little in easing her mind. It was a telegram from Murray that did the trick there. Just a short, terse message, saying that he had accomplished quite a good deal that day. He was well. He had heard her.

"That was Monday. Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday weren't much different. Every evening Rose, growing thinner and more like a spirit herself every hour, struggled through that song, while I stood between her and Thad and held him off. Every evening it grew more difficult for us both. And every evening Thad was more violent and harder to handle. I began to have a sick fear that ours was a ghastly, losing battle. Yet every evening we got a telegram from Murray, saying he was well. And he always added that he heard her.

"On Friday evening it seemed to me that I couldn't go on. Rose was so white and wraithlike that I shook with fear for her. I didn't see how she was going to endure much longer. I wanted to be loyal to Murray, yet I feared he was killing all three of us. He was hard as rock when he thought he was right, and he was nearer apt to be right than any fellow I ever knew. I had no defense for my own reluctance to keep up the battle he had begun for us. I couldn't see any other way out. That evening when the hands of the watch drew close to 8 o'clock, I knew that Rose was about at the end of her tether.

"There was a frightful tension in the atmosphere. I felt a terrific struggle dead ahead of us. I almost yielded to the impulse to tell her to stop, to let the ghastly song alone. But I didn't dare. We'd both given our word to Murray. Then the hands of the watch stood at 8 sharp, and she forced herself to begin playing.

"THAD burst upon us in a wild whirl, full-figured, not even preceded by the vestige of a shadow. I had to make the quickest move of my life to get between him and her. And the moment I did it, I knew his power had come down with him full-fledged. For the first time, I felt him like a body of corporeal flesh. But he was cold, hideously cold. It was like battling with a corpse. And around him rose that putrid odor so strongly that it caused me to choke. He launched himself upon me like a black fury, struggling and trying to reach her. He shouted at her, and every word was clear.

"'Stop!' he screamed. 'Stop that damnable song! I hate it! Stop it!'

"'Don't listen to him, Rose!' I shouted, from a choked throat. 'Keep on—keep on to the end. We promised Murray.'

"And Rose kept on. Her voice wavered and quivered, and her fingers shook till they stumbled over the keys, but she kept steadily on. He shrieked in utter abandonment to fury, and for the first time in my life I was glad of my six feet three and the exercise that had kept my muscles hard as nails. I've always been powerful physically, but I had my hands full then. He raged and tore, struck, bit and kicked, cursed and tried to get to my throat. It took every ounce of strength I possessed to keep him from her. And by the time she had reached the second stanza I realized that he was gaining on me.

"I roused myself to desperate effort, choking in that foul odor, beating back that cold, hideous body. But he was bearing me down. In spite of my frantic, superhuman effort to prevent his accomplishing what he strove to do, he was wearing me down, forcing me back and drawing closer to her. I threw all I had into one last mighty effort, lunging against him, just as Rose swung into the last chorus.

"And suddenly with a wild, horrible shriek, he collapsed in my grip. I staggered, finding it all I could do to keep my feet, as he fell back away from me. He mouthed and gibbered, flinging up his arms above his head like a man so maddened, so utterly overcome by fury that he had no control of himself whatever. There was a sudden flash before my eyes, like a puff of red fire, the room was filled with a rank odor entirely different from the odor that had been there before—an odor like the acrid stench of burning rubbish. Then he was gone with another wild shriek. But he didn't laugh. And abruptly the last word of the song died away, and both Rose and I went out.

"That was the first, last and only time in my life that I ever fainted. And because of my greater strength I came back to consciousness before Rose did. She lay on the floor by the piano bench, so white and still that I thought at first she was dead. But as I stared at her I saw that she was breathing, and I got to my feet and went into the kitchen for some water. I came back and bathed her face with it, and got her back to her senses again. I was weakened, worn as though I'd been through a long sick spell, and she wasn't any better. Time dragged by.

"I got her over to the divan, and she lay down there, while I sat by her side and held her hand and tried to think of something to say. But the same thought was with us both, and we couldn't put it in words. We had both looked at the clock on the wall. It was an hour past time for Murray's telegram to come. And he was punctual. I never knew any man so ironbound in keeping his word as Murray Fielding. It was an hour past time for his telegram, and Thad's last furious shriek rang in our ears. We were both of us on the edge of insanity from suspense when a boy brought a telegram a half-hour later.

"I dragged myself to the door, got the yellow flimsy and brought it to her. She stared at it, shivering, and looked up at me with terrible eyes.

" 'Murray!' she said, and her tone made me wince. 'Oh—Murray—Murray! You open it, Hank. I—can't.'

"I thought at first that I couldn't either; my fingers were cold, and even that flimsy envelope seemed to be too much for them. But at last I managed to get it opened somehow, unfolded the sheet and looked at it with fearful eyes. And at what I saw, I froze. This is what it said:

ROSE READ THIS TWICE THIS AFTERNOON THIS MAN LAWSON AND I WENT OUT TO TAKE DOWN A BIG TREE THE OFFICE TOLD ME TO FELL ONE AND EXAMINE THE GRAIN LAWSON AND I GOT IT ALMOST CUT THROUGH WHEN MRS LAWSON CALLED US IN TO DINNER AFTER DINNER LAWSON SAID WE HAD BETTER HURRY OUT AND GET IT DOWN BEFORE DARK WE GOT ALMOST TO THE TREE WHEN I THOUGHT OF THE TIME I LOOKED AT MY WATCH AND IT WAS JUST EIGHT OCLOCK I STOPPED AND STOOD THERE WAITING FOR YOU THEN I HEARD YOU A SUDDEN WIND CAME UP OUT OF THE CLEAR SKY AND LAWSON EXCLAIMED ABOUT IT THEN LOOKED BACK AND ASKED WHAT I WAS WAITING FOR I MOTIONED HIM TO BE STILL AND HE STROLLED ON UP TO THE TREE AND STOOD IMPATIENTLY WAITING FOR ME I HEARD YOUR VOICE QUIVER AS THOUGH YOU WERE BADLY FRIGHTENED I PUT ALL MY WILL TO HELPING HANK THEN JUST AS YOU GOT INTO THE SECOND CHORUS THAT WIND KEPT RISING WITH A PERFECT FURY AND SUDDENLY THAT TREE SWAYED AND WENT OVER WITH A CRASH IF I HAD NOT STOPPED TO LISTEN TO YOU I WOULD HAVE BEEN UNDER THAT TREE MASHED TO A JELLY AS LAWSON WAS THINK HARD ROSE WE HAVE WON HOME TOMORROW

MURRAY

"I HANDED the telegram to Rose, wordlessly, and she read it with something of eagerness, having been watching the expression of my face. And when she got to the last word she broke down and cried. Every tear she had held back in stunned grief at her father's death demanded its outlet then, along with the tears of joy for Murray. And I sat there, limp with relief, and let her cry. She literally cried herself to sleep. I got her coat out of the hall, threw it over her, and let her sleep. I went across the room and stretched out in an easy chair to watch by her, and she slept there till morning. I warned the old Irishwoman not to wake her. She had come in to say she had some breakfast ready.

"I went out into the kitchen with her and had a bite, but I knew sleep was the best thing Rose could have right then. She was still asleep, four hours later, when Murray came racing up the steps. He'd left Astoria at daybreak. I wrung his hand in speechless gratitude for the outcome of the thing, and turned my back when he went over to kneel by Rose and wake her. Then I did something for which I have no reason and no excuse. I went over to the piano, sat down on the bench, and began to play that song. They were still, behind me, listening—as I played on to the close.

"Just a song at twilight, when the lights are low——"

"There was a slight quiver in the air just beyond me, as though something furious, maddened, but impotent, was striving to reach toward me, and could not. But that was all. The atmosphere of the room remained clear, unpolluted by that foul odor. Thad's malignant, hideous shade never came back again. Murray had won against him and all the dark powers he may have had allied with him.

"And Murray and Rose were married the next week. They had a friend of Rose's sing that song at the wedding. I came away and left them a very happy couple. They're out there in Portland, now, living as serene and untroubled a life as you could wish

for your most beloved friends. In Rose's mind, in place of the gloomy picture of the old asylum, she carries a still photograph of Murray standing with his head lifted, listening for her voice a hundred miles distant, with a great tree falling—safely twenty feet away. And about the first melody she taught their two children was *Love's Old Sweet Song.*

"You know I'm not an imaginative man, Armitage, and you know I don't spin fairy-tales. What have you got to say about curses, now?"

Morgenthaler raised his eyes to the other man's face as he knocked the dottle from his cold pipe.

"Nothing. I've said altogether too much already." Armitage leaned forward in his chair, a strange light in his eyes, and Morgenthaler noted for the first time that the other man's face had gone oddly pale. "I tried for years to find him, but I'd given up hope. I'm greatly indebted to you, Hank. I shall take the next train for Portland. I am Murray Fielding's half-brother."

Épigraphe Pour un Livre Condamné

By CHARLES BAUDELAIRE

(Translated by Clark Ashton Smith)

Bucolic reader, reader wholly
Simple, sober and benign,
Cast down this volume saturnine
And orgiaque and melancholy.

If thou hast learned no lessonry
Of Satan, wileful dean and wise,
Herein were naught for thy surmise,
And madness were my words to thee.

But if thy vision, unbeguiled,
Can dive adown the gulfs of hell,
Read me, and learn to love me well;

Tormented soul, alone, exiled,
And fain of some lost realm divine,
Pity me . . . lest my curse be thine.

A Fantastic and Poetic Tale Is

The Black Angel

By C. ED ROWLEY

THE demesne of the Count Sieur de Brabationo lay between the provinces of Allemtis and Thessily and extended up from the River Wëss to the Vestican Hills. The castle stood in the center of the demesne, and to the north, within a dark forest of yew, there was an ancient and moldering abbey.

Now late in the afternoon of a day in midautumn, the Lord Brabationo proceeded on horseback through the forest on the road to the abbey. And as he rode, this much was easily to be marked of him, that the count was exceedingly unhappily disposed. For he sat slouched low in his saddle, with body listless and head bent and eyes fixed down in idle and mournful contemplation of the road below him. And the sable plume in his hat fell unnoticed about his face and swayed to and fro with the movement of the horse, whilst his long, dark cloak hung in listless abandon, drooping like a great black wing, half-way to the ground. Moreover, even the horse seemed to share his master's dolor, for he moved with slow and funereal step, as if he bore on him the sorrows of a thousand obsequies. Thus, in passing melancholy show, the count moved down the abbey road, and as he rode he numbered his woes. He gave himself over to recalling the divers troubles which of late had fallen upon him like so many plagues, so were they all violently come and wholly unforeseen.

There had occurred within the last few months, under the most peculiar and mysterious circumstances, the death of a well-loved sister; and that sister's son lay even now sick unto death in the pestilent lazaretto at Milan. And even whilst the count had mourned his sister's death and his nephew's plight, a mighty storm had rushed from the mountains, and blasted his fields of grain. Thus Famine and Death stared at his tenants from the coming winter months. And most sadly of all, the count thought him of the madness of his father, who had lately taken to roaming the country, clad in rags, with white hair shaggy and beard uncombed and, like to Elijah and John the Baptizer of Judea, was ever furiously exhorting repentance and God-fear. And this last was the count's most considerable sorrow, since he, Brabationo, was wont to believe in the power of evil over good; in the mightiness of the Black Angel over the righteousness of God. For the count was a Satanist, one who had long ago pledged his soul to Hell and his body to the sustainment of the kingdom thereof. And it was more to the count's sorrow that his father had, in some manner, discovered this truth and by excessive brooding on the matter had gone stark mad. So thus we have a most unseemly paradox, with the Black Angel being pleased to make at one time a devil and a saint, for where Brabationo had incorporated himself in Satan, by so choosing he had put his father into such a fury of good-doing that men were fain to regard the old man as

visited of God, and cures and miracles were reported of him. And so considered the count as now he rode out of the forest and approached the abbey wherein he worshiped his god.

As he drew near to this gloomy, decaying and extremely aged place, he was met by one Barbaces, a hunchback, whom the count had as guardian of the abbey and who, having discerned his master's coming, had hurried forthwith to give him greeting. For the count, despite his pernicious beliefs, was a kindly lord, and it was said that in all the land there was none like to him in charity and kind-doing.

Now the two moved across the large court and Barbaces walked beside the horse, being meantime in eminent hazard of the great charger's hooves, by reason of his dwarfed, wizened body and spindly, short legs. And as they moved across the rotting and grass-choked cobbles, the count looked down upon Barbaces and questioned him in this wise: "There has been no one here, Barbaces, since the occasion of my last visit?"

"No one," said Barbaces, but he spoke hesitantly and he manifested sundry signs of confusion and doubt, all of which the count was quick to remark.

"My father," said Brabationo gently, "has not been seen of late about the countryside and I have been concerned——"

Then quoth Barbaces, "Thy father did come here and I marked his coming and let him not from my sight till he had gone." This last was said in a breath, for Barbaces knew that the count feared the madness of his father, for such was his affliction that he regarded as blasphemous and hellish all his son's art treasures and all the many ancient books with which the abbey was stored. And so it was that when the old man chose to visit the abbey he must be diligently watched lest his fury lead him to do irreparable harm.

Then further questioned Brabationo, "You remained constantly with him?"

"Constantly, my Lord; it was at the end when he would leave that once I let him from my sight. And that was to procure him bread, for such it was he demanded. When I shortly returned he had gone. Meseemeth later I saw him enter the forest."

Brabationo pondered these words. "Nevertheless," said he, "you did wrong to leave him, and if there is harm done within, I shall hold you guilty."

So saying, he dismounted, and dismissing the servant with the horse, he ascended some ruinous stone steps and entered the abbey. He turned aside in the spacious and gloomy vestibule to enter a long, dim, winding corridor by which, at length, he reached a small room in a remote part of the abbey. Here he divested himself of his clothing, donning sandals and a robe of coarse, black material. Then by descending a short flight of steps, he entered a large, long hall which was lighted by torches set in sconces in the wall. Moreover, such was the nature of these torches that as they burned they gave a red, lurid flame and this ghastly light streamed fitfully up the high, dark walls, and moved on the sable drapes, and gleamed wanly in the tall Gothic windows which, on each side of the hall, reached far up, nearly to the shadowy vault overhead. The floor was all of black, gleaming marble, and this reflected the red-burning flames in shimmering, bloody-hued streaks and blurs. At the end of the hall there was a great, black, double door, fantastically carved. To this door the count walked with the slow, solemn step of one who approaches sacred things. He halted before it and removed his sandals. Then he opened the door

just sufficiently for to give him entrance. Once within, he closed it firmly behind him.

It was dark. The darkness might have rolled from out the mouth of Hell, so was it utterly profound and blinding, being *blackness*, warm, sensuous, sweeping the senses with a torrent of strange, elusive perfumes, myrrh, frankincense, olibanum. And as he stood in that palpable dark and fragrance, there pealed out suddenly the faint notes of an ethereal music, and rapidly it swelled and now the darkness shuddered under the power of a mighty anthem; it surged, thundering, rolling, while meantime shrilled high piping notes of wild delight; then as suddenly it subsided; it held for a moment of exquisite tremulousness, then vanished. It was the music of an Eolian harp, suspended high in the darkness. Swept by the wind, it emitted notes, now of titanic power, and now of paradisiacal sweetness.

Brabationo stood for a moment, held by strange, awful emotions. Then, groping in the dark, he moved ahead until his feet encountered a rug, on which he threw himself. He lay quiet. He abandoned himself to an ecstasy of mysterious and unrestrained feelings. And meanwhile he sensed that before him, hidden in darkness, stood the image of his god. This was a statue carved of rarest ebony into the likeness of a man. And the body of this man was more beautiful than any woman's.

After a time the harp sounded again; the golden notes reverberated softly through the darkness, speaking, now low and gentle, so ineffably restful a melody that the worshiper felt an infinite peace upon him. And he spoke after this manner:

"O Thou brother of man, Prince of Worldlings, Thou beloved of men, wherever man does suffer, since by Thee and for Thee men do suffer, know that I worship Thee. Lend ear to my prayers, I beseech Thee, nor turn ever from me, for there is none like to Thee in kindliness and there is none on Earth or in false Heaven I love as I do love Thee."

Then Brabationo ceased to speak and he rested his head on his arm and wept, for reason of a great sadness within him. And the music died in sweet low humming murmurings, and after a time it was still. The darkness pressed heavily about him; the slow hours passed. Thus the night waxed older.

Then when the harp sounded again, it spoke a mystic strain. The notes swept the fragrant darkness in a warm, slow-falling rain of melody through which slowly moved a low measure, slumberous and voluptuous. And there were whisperings and sighings and vague languishing movements; meantime voices told of exquisite longings and of strange, poignant desires. And the worshiper stirred; and he spoke softly in this wise:

"O Thou who knoweth of the only good, which good is the body's delight and the soul's exaltation therein, I pray to Thee for these things. That Thou wilt teach me new hungers, that Thou wilt fill me with strange subtle longings, that Thou wilt give me desires. And when I am anhungered give me not surfeit and when I am in longing suffer me not respite. For the world teaches these things, that there is joy in hungering and longing and having ever great desires, whereas it is as much taught that content hath neither hope nor life, being, withal, cold and wholly desolate. Thus it is I pray Thee to grant me these things."

Thereupon Brabationo became silent, and, soon after, the music ceased. And he lay long without stirring, and when the slow hours passed he heeded not their passing. Meantime the incense died and the darkness grew colder as the night waned.

Then at last he was slowly roused. For some obscure sense had given entrance into his ecstasy of worship to a vague feeling of disquietude. He tried to cast it from him, to bury himself further into his spiritual detachment, but in vain. The feeling persisted; it grew, and now disquietude trembled on the verge of actual fear. Then it was he strained all senses in an endeavor to trace the feeling to its source. He stared ahead trying to pierce the darkness—could it be of *that?* Or the deathly chill? The utter absence of sound? Or was there in the darkness some vague, some nearly indiscoverably faint odor?

At that moment the harp sounded. It struck repeatedly, with slow, deliberate, measured strokes, a low, solemn, muffled note that sounded through the gloom like the tolling of a death knell. And then, around this ill-omened tolling, there lifted distant sounds that drifted and twisted in the vagaries of a strange, strange melody, one withal so fitful, so mournful and utterly wild that it seemed all the legions of the distant dead must there bewail unearthly sorrows in some unholy dirge, in some blasphemous, ghostly fugue that throbbed and beat with the heavy, thudding tolling of a funeral bell. And the dirge grew louder and wilder, the bell tolled faster, and wilder still sounded the chant: it surged, rising, writhing in a grinding, discordant charivari of Death, Death white-robed and triumphant, riding amain before the horrible thunder of iron bells! And into this groaning, shrieking, writhing din the voice of Brabationo entered and itself was now like to the screaming of a soul in Hell.

"Satan! Master! I beseech Thee, heed me! Oh, wherefore is there sorrow in me and fear and utter loneliness when I have Thee for mine own? Thou wouldst not turn from *me!* If Thou leavest me, Thou wilt doom me; whom have I save Thee? Master, I pray Thee, speak to me; I beseech Thee, give me a sign. Satan, give me a sign!"

At once all sound stopped. The silence was awful. It was as if the darkness had become Death, hushed, chill, crushing with stillness. And lo, it *was* Death, for now it breathed gently through the darkness on Brabationo and its breath was nauseous and cadaverous, smelling of dead flesh! A frenzy of blind terror seized him; he groped desperately back. Reaching the great doors he flung them open wide.

A lurid red torrent of ghastly light from the outer room rolled far through the darkness. Then Brabationo saw that the great black statue had toppled from its pedestal to the floor. He saw further that it had fallen straight across his father's back. The old man lay flat, crushed, his chin pressed against his arm, his head thrust back. And through his long white hair he regarded his son with a fierce and unrelenting glare.

In the early morning the dwarf Barbaces met the Count Sieur de Brabationo in one of the vast, shadowy halls of the abbey. And despite the gloom it was easily to be marked that the count was exceedingly ill disposed. For his face was pale and he stared straight before him with wide, unseeing eyes, while he walked with a slow, faltering step, as one who has been stunned. Moreover, he was most singularly attired, being barefoot and hatless, and wearing but a coarse black robe. He drew near to the dwarf and spoke quietly to him; then, turning, he walked slowly away, vanishing in the darkness at the end of the hall. Meanwhile Barbaces hastened to that part of the abbey which had been hitherto denied him, and there, as the count had told him, lay the body of Brabationo's father. It lay under an ebony

statue which was so heavy that the dwarf must summon aid before he could secure the body. And Barbaces was inconsolable and he wept loud and fiercely, since it was by his error that the old man had wandered into the forbidden chambers to meet his death. For manifestly the count's father, who hated as blasphemous and hellish all his son's art treasures, had attempted to destroy the rarely beautiful statue. Instead he had toppled it upon himself and thereby died. And the dwarf wept, and all who were with him did likewise, and, thus lamenting, they bore the body from the abbey. Then, for as much as men regarded the old man as visited of God, they interred him in a holy place. Even to this day he lies there, and it is said that whatsoever ailment a man may have, he has but to touch the tomb to be straightway cured.

But for the Count Sieur de Brabationo we have no word, for he was never seen again by men; albeit legend has it that he lives, a holy hermit, in the forest about the abbey, and that before the end of all earthly things he will come forth, clad in rags, with hair shaggy and beard uncombed, and like to Elijah and John the Baptizer and like even to the saint, his father, he will roam the country and ever furiously exhort men to repentance and God-fear.

THE TREE-MAN GHOST

By PERCY B. PRIOR

THE day was hot, as the July sun filled Strathspey with pulsing heat, which danced and waved along the ground. Colin Kerr and Alan Maclure trudged along on their way to Abernesby, longing for a breath of cool air or the welcome shade of a tree.

"When we reach yon tree," Colin said, "I'm going to rest awhile."

He pointed to a solitary-looking tree which grew beside a little brook —a brook which, by and by, made its way into the River Spey. The grass all round was beautifully green, but the tree looked strange. At some time it must have been struck by lightning, which had blasted its head, and left it withered and white, and given the trunk a curious tilt, so that it seemed to stoop forward as if peering at something on the ground. Two out-flung branches, looking exactly like arms, grew on either side of it, and heightened its likeness to a human being.

One could imagine an owl making its home in it, or bats, but certainly not little singing birds. Still there was shelter under its branches, and the two weary travelers sank down thankfully on the grass.

There was an ancient ruin on the other side of the burn. An old legend told that treasure had been buried somewhere near. Colin Kerr, who was an old man and knew many ancient stories, told Alan the tale as they sat and rested. Robbers had plundered an old church and had hidden their booty somewhere among the ruins. They had been caught

and hanged, and the secret of these hidden treasures had never been revealed.

Alan's eyes gleamed as he listened. "I wish we could find it," he said. "We could live like gentlemen, Colin, and do no more work."

Colin, stretched on the grass, laughed drowsily. "There would be no blessing on it," he said. "It was stolen from the Church."

He lay on his right side as he slept, and because he was left-handed, as are all the Kerrs, his dagger hung over his right hip. Alan's eyes were attracted by the sunlight gleam on its hilt, then his eyes wandered to the face of the sleeping man. How old he looked as he slept! His bare throat almost scraggy—it would not take much to—why on earth was he thinking such things?

Colin's mouth was slightly open and he snored as he slept; he was an old man—he couldn't have many years to live—and again Alan tried to shake off the evil suggestions which were creeping like serpents into his mind. He would go to sleep, too. But it was no use. His brain was in a whirl.

Unwillingly he looked again at his companion's face. How soundly he slept! The sun was still glittering on the hilt of his dagger. Moved by an irresistible impulse, Alan put forth his hand and drew the weapon out of its sheath. But next moment he was dreadfully alarmed, for the sleeper began to moan and mutter and toss his hands about, and then Alan saw coming out of his mouth a strange, indistinct form, scarce bigger than a bumble-bee, but without wings.

It crawled along the sleeper's clothes down on the sod till it came to the brook, which it would neither fly over nor swim. It turned back and back and tried again. It did this so often that Alan stretched the dagger over the brook, and allowed the strange insect to creep over to the other side. Alan's attention was now fixed on this strange sight. He followed it, and saw it disappear right into a part of the old ruin, which was thickly overgrown with heather and moss. It did not stay long in this place, but, crawling out again, it made its way back to the sleeper, and re-entered his mouth. Alan was so amazed he could not keep silent any longer. He gave a cry which awakened Colin.

"What is wrong with you?" Colin asked, sitting up and yawning. "You have wakened me from a beautiful dream. I dreamed I was walking through a fine, rich country, and came at length to the shores of a noble river; and just where the clear water went thundering down a precipice there was a bridge all of silver, which I crossed; and then, entering a noble palace on the opposite side, I saw great heaps of gold and jewels, and I was just going to load myself with the treasure when you rudely awoke me, and I lost all. I am going to dig in the ruins—perhaps I'll find the treasure; and if I do I'll restore it to the Church," Colin Kerr said.

"I'll help you," said Alan; but his face was evil as he said the words, and when Colin was not looking he hid the stolen dagger in his belt.

They had no proper tools, but they set to work with their hands, and, sure enough, they found, just at the place where the strange insect had entered, a hoard of gold and silver, and silver vessels, and armpieces and jewels.

"Colin," Alan whispered, "could we not keep this to ourselves? No one knows about it, and we found it."

Colin turned on him in rage. "The things belong to the Bishopric of Dornoch," he said. "Often and often have I heard my father tell the story. Remember what happened to

the man in the Bible that took the garment and the wedge of silver, and the bar of gold."

"Old wives' tales," Alan cried.

Colin, his face white with rage, turned on him with angry words. Then, like a flash, Alan had his dagger out—it flashed through the air, there was a queer choking sound, a sobbing breath, and Colin sank on his knees, fighting, with a stream of blood flowing from his throat.

"I—call—that—tree—to witness," he gasped, "that—I—have—been—foully murdered."

But Alan heeded not. He was mad with excitement, and scarcely gave a thought to the murdered man.

In frantic haste he tore up the stones, and found more buried treasure—there were gold and silver church vessels, coins far more than he could carry. He gloated over his hoard—it was all his—all his! He threw a triumphant look at the figure of the dead man—and then suddenly, for the first time, he noticed how strange the tree looked. It was almost as though it were standing peering down at him, lifting up its arms in horror. Its blasted top seemed to peep out at him from the leaves like a face.

He felt a momentary chill, but next minute he had turned to his find again—he was filling his pockets and his knapsack with the treasure.

LATE that evening he returned with a spade and buried his companion at the foot of the tree. It was not a pleasant task, and he knew that if he would stop to think he would be miserable. So in frantic haste he hid his crime, filled a sack with money, and hurried away.

It is said he went to the town of Perth to live, and that he became a wealthy man. No one knew how he had come by his money, and no one wished to make friends with him. He lived alone, and by and by people began to notice that this unhappy-looking rich young man was always followed by a shadow. It was not his own shadow either, but that of a tree with a blasted head and strange outspread branches. One man, Harry Murray by name, went the length of saying that one evening he had seen this shadow tree, and that from its top a white and terrible face had looked out.

Alan himself pretended to be unconscious of this strange shadow, but often as he walked on the road he would stop suddenly, and so would the tree shadow. Once, impelled by some unknown force, he journeyed back to Speyside and found the actual tree just as he had first seen it. No one had ever inquired about Colin Kerr. His secret was safe. The tree with the dead man buried beneath it could not do him any harm.

That night the tree kept step with him, walking beside him, peering forward as if to look into his face, watching him, threatening him, filling him with nameless and numberless terrors.

This went on for years, so say the records, which also relate that "for all his gear, he never got a friend to bide wi' him, nor a lass to marry him. At last he was weary of it all, and went to the priest and told him the way of it." The priest listened to the strange tale.

It is said that Alan sought to enter the monastery to make reparation. All the wealth which had brought him so little happiness he restored to the Church, but the tree overshadowed him till his dying day, which came very soon after his confession.

The Reverend Dr. Forsyth, minister of Abernesby, tells that the queer tree has long since rotted away; but the Tree-Man is still to be seen, flitting—a ghost, with a tree shadow—along Strathspey.

The GIANT WORLD

by RAY CUMMINGS

"He had no other thought but to kill."

The Story Thus Far

MARTT GRYCE and his sister Frannie, with Frank Elgon, voyage to a distant world to rescue Brett Gryce, traveling in a space-vehicle that can go through space and time. They find Brett about to be married to Leela, the daughter of Greedo, an old musician. The space-voyagers are invited to attend the wedding, which is to take place on an island in the middle of a lake. During the festivities which precede the marriage ceremony, a giant appears in the lake, wading toward them, and in the resultant confusion Frannie and Leela are captured by the giant, Rokk, and his wife, Mobah, and carried up into the vaster world of the giants. Martt and Zee (Leela's sister) take from the sleeping giant Degg the size-changing drug by which the giants have come down into this world, and force Degg to lead them to his own realm. Up into largeness unfathomable they go, accompanied by the strange animal Eeff, and as they emerge into the giants' world they find Frannie struggling in the tentacles of a monstrous blood-red vegetable thing that has unrooted itself and attacked her.

CHAPTER 6

THE BLOOD-RED DAY

TO FRANNIE, the subterranean river was an inferno of roaring blackness. Her dhrane was whirled along, sometimes swimming, sometimes floundering desperately. Frannie clung to its antlers and closed her eyes. . . . An eternity. . . . She heard Rokk shouting; felt the dhrane scrambling upon solid ground. The water dropped away from its sides. . . .

Frannie found herself and her dhrane standing in a dull, luminous darkness upon a ledge by the river. The other dhranes were there. Rokk spoke to Leela.

"What does he say?" Frannie demanded.

"He says we must get larger—this is too dangerous."

They followed then the methods used afterward by Degg in guiding Martt and Zee. Wading, in a large size, they went down the river. Then into the passageway leading upward.

And then the climb into largeness. To Frannie it seemed unending; but though they were only an hour or two ahead of Martt in starting, they were several hours ahead when they reached the giant world. Frannie and Leela were near to exhaustion, even though they had ridden most of the way. Rokk had not paused to sleep.

It was day when they reached the desolate land of the Ares. Then a tomblike night; then blood-red day again.

Rokk rode now with Frannie and Leela beside him, and the woman Mobah behind. Rokk was jubilant. He talked swiftly to Leela. At intervals, Leela translated.

"He says he is glad to have us. He is taking us to his house—his mound, he calls it. He says, very soon there is something important happening up here. He is going to take us—show us it—happening." Leela shuddered.

"What is going to happen?" Frannie demanded.

"I don't know. Something—sinister, horrible. You saw his face when he told me?"

Frannie had seen it, indeed, but she was striving to master her fear. There was something queerly sinister, inhuman, about Rokk. And his smile had a leer to it. Shining in his dark eyes, which often were fixed thoughtfully on Leela, there was a look Frannie could not fail to understand. The woman, Mobah, had noticed it. Once, over her broad expressionless face a torrent of passion had swept. Hate? Jealousy? It flashed at Leela—and at Frannie—and was instantly gone.

Frannie said now, "Ask him what he wants of us. Why did he ever go down into our world?"

Leela listened to Rokk's smiling explanation. The man's voice was soft, caressing. Leela went white.

"He says, Frannie—he says his world here is very harsh—not good to live in. There is very little food—he says that he and some other men—his followers—are planning to descend into my world and conquer it. Kill all its men—Frannie, don't you understand?—kill, just the men of my world——"

There was a silence. Then Leela added, with a frightened hush to her voice, "Up here all is bleak and terrible. The women are all like this woman behind us—unbeautiful——"

Rokk was riding faster now, and soon, as they ascended a rise of ground, his home came into view. It lay on a falling slope, with paths trodden in the snow about it—a bulging mound built of pressed blocks of the gray-black snow. It rose above the surface perhaps ten feet—an oblong mound twenty feet wide and five times as long, like the grave of some giant buried there, with a small upright chimney at its farther end for a headstone. A few rectangles of white marked its doors and windows as though one might care to stand on the ground and gaze down at the coffin entombed within. Near by, two other mounds lay like the graves of children, with beaten paths connecting them.

Rokk's home was set alone in the midst of this snowy waste! Frannie's heart was cold with apprehension. What was to be her fate—and Leela's—within?

At Rokk's call a half-grown boy appeared in a doorway of the main mound. He led the dhranes away. Frannie and Leela were taken down a crude flight of icy steps and into the mound. It was much longer than it appeared; it seemed to extend at least another story underground,

for Frannie saw an incline leading downward.

They had entered the top story. Rokk led them along a passageway; Frannie saw low-roofed rooms, with ceilings curved to the mound. Each with a window opening at the ground level; and with crude furniture seemingly fashioned from stone blocks.

Into such a room Rokk ushered them. He was smiling, bowing like a friendly host; his words to Leela were suave. But in his eyes there was an unmistakable irony, and when Frannie hesitated at the door, he pushed her roughly.

Mobah had disappeared. Rokk stood a moment talking to Leela. The door to the passageway was open. Rokk and Leela had their backs to it. Frannie became aware that beyond the door Mobah was standing listening. And in the dimness there, Frannie caught a glimpse of the woman's intense face. It was torn with a jealous passion—a torrent of loosed passion debasing its calm stolidity into an aspect almost bestial.

As Rokk turned slightly, the lurking woman silently fled. Rokk bowed to Frannie, and to Leela—a bow ceremoniously grotesque, but with a dignity, nevertheless. His hand lingered on Leela's white arm, but Leela jerked away. He shrugged, smiled, and went through the door, barring it after him.

"Oh, Frannie!" Leela at last gave way. She sobbed with fright unrestrained; and this gave Frannie additional strength to be calm. She sat Leela on the couch—a railed slab of stone, with a litter of furs on it like the bed of an animal. She tried to comfort Leela. Then left her; tried the door softly. It was stoutly barred.

Then she tried the window. It had a pane as transparent as glass, but evidently unbreakable. Frannie struck it recklessly with her fist. And there seemed no way to open the window. Through it Frannie could see along the snow-covered ground outside. The night had just come. The ground was dark, with faint stars showing above.

Frannie sat on the bed with Leela. They were both so exhausted that for a time they slept. Hours, perhaps—Frannie never knew. Then she awoke. The scene in the room was unchanged. It was night again. Leela was awake. Frannie began questioning her as to what Rokk most recently had said. Leela was outwardly calm now.

"He—insists we are not to be harmed, Frannie. He told me—just before he left—that he wanted me to like him." A shiver ran over Leela's frail body. "He will work to make me like him—he will be very good to me. And you—he says there is a young man—that man he left back in Reaf—named Degg. He is sure Degg will like you, Frannie."

"Did he say any more about that important thing which is going to happen?"

"Yes. He said he is going to take us somewhere—as soon as we have rested, and Degg has come to join us here. Take us somewhere—where we shall see a wonderful awesome sight. Frannie, he told me the men here in this world do not like their women. He has brought me and you—to show us to the men—that they may see how beautiful women can be. Then—they will join him to go down into smallness—to conquer——"

Leela choked. She added, and a hush fell upon her voice: "Frannie, this Rokk has planned it all. He says there is too little food here. The women—and the children that the men no longer want to feed—are all placed apart. Exiled to a city—where he is going to take us. And show us——"

A tapping at the window checked her. The girls stared at each other with the blood draining from their faces. A gentle tapping from out-

side. A scraping, fumbling as though soft fingers were working at the window.

Frannie stood up, trembling. Then she moved along the wall, and with her face to the window, peered out. The tapping had stopped. Outside she saw a faint, lurid red glow. And three gleaming spots of green. Moving, peering. And then like the tendrils of a creeping vine, a leafy something, with a red sheen upon it, gently beating at the pane; tapping—fumbling.

Frannie drew back. "Leela—out there——" But another sound stopped her. Someone—something—was unbarring the door of their room! The two girls were frozen with terror, incapable of sound or movement. A bar dropping with a muffled thump! The door slowly began opening inward. . . .

It was the woman Mobah. Her face was grim; her dull eyes were smoldering green-black coals. She flung a menacing glance at the girls, moved swiftly across the room. Her fingers at the pane touched some hidden lock. The window swung open.

Mobah darted back, seized Leela, tried to shove her toward Frannie and the window. Leela screamed, resisted, fought with all her little strength and called a warning to Frannie.

But it was too late. Through the window a thick, red-glowing tentacle came slithering. Its green eyes were waving triumphantly. It caught Frannie; rolled back upon itself, jerking her upward.

Heavy steps sounded in the passageway outside the room, and Rokk's alarmed voice, shouting. Rokk burst in. He knocked Mobah aside with a blow of his fist, and swept Leela protectingly backward.

The segment of red thing within the room slithered out the window, carrying Frannie with it.

II

"She is gone, my lady Leela. It is unfortunate, but we can not help it. She is lost—we shall never see her again."

Leela and Rokk were alone in the room. Leela shrank upon the couch; against his gaze she huddled with a corner of the robe drawn to shield her white limbs. He stood before her.

"Gone, Leela. Dead, by now. . . . Don't shudder, little white woman. It is the law of life—some live, some die. . . . But Degg will be sorry."

She had no words, no heart with which to answer.

He went on, with a frown crossing his face. "That vegetable thing coming here has changed my plans. It has no right to be unrooted. I grew it, Lady Leela—and many others of its kind—for a certain purpose. But now it has broken away, before I was quite ready to dig it up. It thinks it is full-grown. It is conscious of its power. And that which during all its growth I have taught it to do——" He shrugged. "I suppose they have all broken loose. All roaming——" A horrible grimness came to Rokk's voice. "Well, they will do what I taught them—we shall have to hurry if we wish to see it, Lady Leela."

Leela summoned words. "To see—what?"

He smiled. "You are impatient—and as becomes only a woman—curious! You shall see, little white woman—blood-red things——" He gestured. "Enough of that. But you shall realize how great is Rokk. I planned it all. But now I shall have to change my plans a little. I had wanted to show you and your friend—the little Frannie—to the men of this world. So that they—our men—would know how beautiful women can be. There is no time now, with the red things broken loose. We shall have to be careful, my Leela. I shall send word to all the men everywhere to have a care. . . . I wish Degg would

come—but we can not wait for him now. . . . There are animals, too, who should be guarded from these roaming red vines I have grown. You have not seen our animals, Leela? Degg has one—a very friendly thing; we call it Eeff. It is but half human—and only half materialized into substance. A loyal friend, if it likes you. But its mentality is that of an imbecile. . . . I talk too much, like a loose-tongued woman. There is no time—we must start."

He called roughly, "Mobah! Come here at once!"

The woman appeared, sullen, defiant. On the flesh of her heavy gray shoulder was a red bruise where Rokk had struck her.

"Mobah! Bring the dhranes. We are leaving for the Ice City. Tell my boy here to have Degg follow us when he comes. . . . Hurry! . . ."

III

They rode fast. Alternate night and day—endless frozen wastes. Occasionally they passed single mounds, isolated like that of Rokk. Others in groups; blood-stained graveyards by day—eery and gruesome in the starlight. Leela saw many of the green-white animals, lurking like werewolves prowling among the mounds. And there were men gazing curiously at the travelers. To them often Rokk gave a warning that the vegetable things were loose.

But he said to Leela, "There really is no danger. These things I have grown will do my purpose in the Ice City. Then I will command them back to their fields. Let them rot there harmlessly in a red welter. I can control them. They know me for their creator—their master."

There were few women or girls to be seen about the mounds. Rokk said, with a horrible irony, "We have sent most of them to the Ice City. It is a very beautiful place—we men have sent our women there. The women——" He laughed sarcastically. "They are very stupid. They do not guess our purpose."

They rode in silence. Then Rokk spoke again. "My woman, Mobah"—he glanced behind at the patient figure riding behind them—"I have kept Mobah with me. She is good to work in the mound. But you, my Lady Leela——" He chuckled. "We shall get rid of Mobah all in good time. We do not want her around, do we? But I will not make you work, Leela. In your city of Crescent, little white woman, you and I will be very great people. I shall be the leader of all our men——"

Again Leela did not answer.

A red day plunged into night. Far to the left across the snowy wastes to the distant horizon, Leela saw a white radiance in the sky. A vague patch of silver, as of light reflected from some remote distance below the horizon. Rokk waved his hand.

"You see that, Leela? That is where I found the drugs. This globe is very fair, off there. Longer days and nights. A warm, fruitful summer. Food is there. Trees, with fruit. But it is all owned by another race of people. They will not let us in. They are very powerful—very far advanced in civilization. A wonderful age of science. . . . They know everything. I crept into one of their cities and stole the drugs."

To Leela then was driven home the conception of how vast is God's great plan of the Universe. This miserable region owned by Rokk's people was no more than the Polar waste of this globe. A fairer land of science lay there where the distant radiance showed. A great, cultured civilization perhaps. And farther beyond it—other races—all on this one tiny globe whirling among these stars. . . .

They came at last within sight of the City of Ice. In the starlight it glittered with a pale sheen. It stood on a broad plateau above the sur-

rounding valleys—a place of white spires, glittering under the stars, the whole surrounded by a high white wall of ice.

And as they came closer, Leela saw within the city a yellow-red glare. Behind it, a high tower of stone dominated the scene; the glare painted the tower a yellow-red upon one side. "The pit of fire," said Rokk. "The one place in all our realm where the fires underground come near the surface. It brings a warmth—a beauty. You shall see." He laughed his horrible laugh. "That is why we tell the women they should like it here——"

They approached the wall. Rokk gazed around. "We are but just in time." In the farther distance beyond the city was a red sheen against the ground. Rokk understood it, though at the moment Leela did not. "Just in time, little woman. I had thought we might better enter by the tunnel under the wall. But that is not necessary."

They rode through a gate, plunged at once into a passageway, and emerged presently within the stone tower, left the dhranes there, and mounted the tower. At its top, Rokk stood with Leela. Mobah sullenly was behind them. Rokk glanced back at her. He said softly, "I think perhaps she guesses what is to happen. But she can do nothing about it."

Presently Mobah moved away and disappeared. Rokk patted his belt. "I have all the drugs here, Leela. All there are in this whole realm—except a very little of each which I left with Degg. We must guard them carefully."

To Leela came the thought that she might gain possession of the drugs and thus escape. But Rokk was very watchful.

They stood upon a broad balcony, with the single tower room behind them and a breast-high parapet in front. At the parapet, Leela gazed down. From this height the city lay spread beneath them. It was still night. A simple, placid scene, quiet, and in a measure beautiful. A few broad streets of packed, gray-black snow. Flat, oblong houses of ice blocks which were white and glittering, with spires and minarets occasionally adorning them.

Directly beneath Leela, at the foot of the tower, was a yawning yellow-red pit. She could see directly down into it; a glare, some great distance down to where the fires of the earth were broken out. Rising wisps of smoke . . . a sulfurous, fiery breath . . . and a torrent of grateful heat surging upward.

Around the pit, the city was built of stone for a distance, like a broad, square park. Trees were growing there; huge, graceful ferns; blue-green leaves like great flopping ears of an animal. And giant palms, hung with purple fruit. . . . A tropical garden, with flower-lined, winding paths. . . . By contrast with all this bleak region Leela had seen, the single little park was very beautiful.

There were a few women moving about the city—dull, heavy-looking, shapeless women robed in a monotone of drab garments. Uninspired of aspect. Yet each had a soul . . . desires . . . longings. . . .

In the park a woman sat and played with a little girl. There was another woman, newly arrived here, with a baby at her breast. . . .

Rokk's voice broke upon Leela's thoughts with a rasp. "But who is to feed them? It gets very tiresome, giving them food. . . . Ah! Now you shall see my solution, Lady Leela——"

Beyond the city walls, out over the starlit, snowy wastes, spots of red sheen were visible. Moving. Coming nearer. Spots of red sheen resolving into long, thin lines of red. Undulating, twisting, slithering forward. Green spots of eyes, waving, peering.

Red, growing things unrooted. Coming monstrously to do that for which during all their growth they

had been trained. There seemed thousands of them. Over every distant slope they came closing in upon the city. Thick red vines a hundred feet long. Others grown into a tangled clump, every separate tendril of which was in slimy movement. A red boll, like the bulging trunk of a tree. It rolled, leaped. Another of a flat, round central growth, with prickling spines like huge needles standing erect, and waving, groping tentacles. It hitched itself along, awkwardly.

They came from everywhere. Red, gleaming monsters of the ground, advancing with a grim, uncanny silence, closing in upon the city.

Leela watched, with the blood freezing in her veins. Within the city no alarm had sounded. The woman in the park played with her little girl. But the baby at the other woman's breast was crying. . . .

The first of the red things reached the city wall. Slithered up like some monstrous red ivy growing there. A thing of dangling green pods from which a slimy juice was dripping. A segment of it raised high over the wall, with green eyes staring down.

In a near-by street a headless, friendly animal gave out its imbecilic cry. The two women in the park looked and saw, and screamed. . . .

The red thing rose and slithered over the wall. Stretched its length down a street; then encircled a house, its wide-flung segments slithering into every door and window. Screams from in there sounded over the silent, starlit city. Shrill, throat-tearing screams of women . . . and the piping, terrified cries of children. . . .

The alarm spread. The cries were caught up, echoed from everywhere about the city. Women and girl children were rushing in a panic from the houses. . . .

Over the wall at its every point, the red things were climbing . . . spreading over the city . . . filling the streets . . . climbing with a red, leafy growth into houses . . . green peering eyes, searching everywhere. . . .

One of the flat, round growths with prickling spines—needles each as long as a human body—lurched itself into the park. With a sudden spring it caught a running woman. Its tentacles tossed her aloft. She fell, impaled upon its swordlike spines. Its tentacles pulled an arm from her body . . . tossed the arm away. . . . The woman was still screaming—horribly. . . .

Leela, sickened, covered her face with her hands. She heard Rokk's gloating voice, "You see—my solution? Look, little white woman! Make your heart stout, like Rokk's. This is the law of life. Some live, some die. We—you and I—will live, for love, when this blood-red day is over."

Day! The dawn had come. The red sun rose from the horizon in its low arc. Red, staining everything.

Leela, with a fascination, again involuntarily stared. The city was a chaos of terror. From windows, with reason fled, women were leaping. The red things caught them as they fell. . . . On a flat housetop a woman crouched with a baby in her arms, and a little girl huddling at her knees. A slim red arm came up over the parapet of roof. Other red things came up, and poised with watching green eyes. The woman fought the red arm with all her meager strength. It seized the baby, waved the small, gray-white body aloft, dashed it to a red pulp against the stone of the parapet. Other arms jerked the little girl away. A flat, red thing engulfed the woman and sat mouthing and tearing. . . .

In the park a crowd of the women were huddled. Some were trying to climb the high railing at the pit of fire, but could not. The red things slithered among them. . . .

The blood-red day! A white, glittering city, stained crimson now. Splashed and stained; and upon it

the red sun poured a polluting, gory light. . . .

The blood-red day. . . .

CHAPTER 7

THE FIGHT ON THE PARAPET

MARTT stood in the starlight at the top of the slope, frozen into immobility with horror. Frannie was struggling in the grip of the red vine, being dragged along, with others of its kind leading the way. Grown and taught for nothing but the blood-red day of the Ice City, these things with single purpose were dragging Frannie there.

Martt stood stricken for an instant. The red thing paused. All its green eyes turned. Beyond it the other things came to a stop, irresolute, and then slithered on. But the one with Frannie lay momentarily quiescent; only its eyes were quivering.

Martt became aware that Zee and Degg were beside him. Eeff was crouching at its master's feet, whimpering with terror. Martt shouted, "Zee, run back! Come on, Degg!"

He caught a glimpse of Degg's face, gray with fright. But his eyes showed a sudden determination. And Degg leaped, with Martt after him.

The red thing flung up its forward tentacles, and shoved Frannie farther back within its folds. Degg leaped for the clump of its branches where Frannie was entangled.

Martt, running forward, abruptly stopped. One of the drug cylinders within his pockets had bumped his thigh. A thought swept him—the drug for smallness! He stopped; recklessly poured from the cylinder nearly half its contents. And stood, with a huge buckle of his jacket, crushing the white tablets into a powder in his hand.

Degg had fought his way to Frannie. He had torn her loose, thrust her violently away, but was himself entrapped. He fought, ripping, tearing at the red branches, struggling to avoid the sinuous tentacles which curled back at him. A thick tendril of the vine had wound itself about his legs. . . .

With the powder in his left hand, Martt rushed forward. There was a part of the red thing which seemed of lesser size and strength. Martt rushed in among its lashing brambles. They entwined him. He ducked the sweep of a tentacle thick as his body. Eyes on the branches peered into his face. He seized one, pulled it off. A slime with a red phosphorescence was on his fingers. A pod struck his face; he tore it open and scattered its seeds. A red, noisome juice spattered him. . . .

Martt was fighting only with his right hand. One of his legs was gripped and held; he kicked, striving to free it.

These smaller branches were easily broken. They mashed, some of them like a porous, tropical plant, oozing sap. They were spongy. Martt scattered a little of the white powder; sifted it through his fingers. The vegetable growth sucked it up—the drug mingled with the sap of its bruises.

The branches were dwindling. Upon vegetable the drug acted more swiftly than upon animal cells. The smaller tendrils shriveled. Then branches of greater thickness. Martt could feel them letting go their hold—shrinking, loosening their grip.

Around him in a moment was a shriveled, shrunken bramble. He kicked himself free. A huge tentacle from another portion licked back and seized him; whirled him aloft. But he kept his wits. Tore at it with his fingers; rubbed the drug into its bruised bark. Along all its length, the drug acted. Martt's weight brought its shriveled strength to the ground. He fell upon his feet; tore himself loose again. Stamped and tore, and leaped away.

Throughout all the length of the monstrous vine, now, the drug was

acting. Martt momentarily stood inactive, panting. He saw that Degg had freed Frannie—saw her and Zee huddled at a distance on the slope near by. Degg was still fighting; one of his legs seemed queerly twisted; an arm of the red vine held him, but he kept his feet. Eeff was darting forward and back, too much terrified to approach, yet anxious to help.

The vine everywhere was shrinking. Martt ran to free Degg. But he was too late. The largest remaining tentacle lashed forward; it caught Degg, whirled him up in the air and flung him heavily to the ground. Degg lay still.

A moment. Then the vine was so shriveled that Martt waded throughout its lashing length. Tore it apart. Scattered it. Stamped upon its twisting, slithering red segments.

All dwindling. Separate, dismembered segments quivering around him . . . smaller . . . red, twisting lines, with tiny green eyes. . . . They winked and vanished into smallness. . . .

II

"Is he dead? Oh, Martt, do you think he is dead?"

They bent over Degg and he opened his eyes. Martt knelt and lifted his head. It was evident that he was dying; and evident, too, that he knew it. He spoke, laboriously whispered words in Zee's language. He tried to gesture toward Zee; on his face was an earnestness, almost a desperation lest he might fail to give his dying message.

Martt said, "Zee, he's trying to talk to you. Bend closer—he's talking."

Zee knelt at his head. He was panting, struggling breathlessly with each word. "Rokk—was going to take your sister Leela to the—City of Ice. Now that the red things are loose—I think you will find—him and her—there."

His breath ended with a long sigh. But he began again. "Eeff will lead you. Tell Eeff—to take you through the—tunnel into the—stone tower. And—hurry!"

His eyes closed. Then they opened very wide. They tried to focus on Zee's face. She bent lower to hear his faint whisper. "Hurry! You understand—about Leela, there with Rokk. He means, for her, a thing very terrible. You must—hurry." He added, with a breath so faint she barely heard his words, "You are—so very beautiful, little Zee. I never saw—any woman so beautiful. But I am not Rokk—I could not have harmed you."

He stiffened just a trifle; then went limp, his head with staring eyes dangling backward over Martt's arm.

Martt laid him gently on the ground. Eeff went and sat by him, crying softly.

III

It was red day when they approached the City of Ice. Eeff had led them, as Degg suggested. They saw the city from far off, with a red glow staining its white glitter. Then Eeff plunged them into a black tunnel. It seemed miles. Then it ascended, and they emerged into a wave of heat, with a yellow-red glare beside them.

They were at the bottom of a tall stone tower; a doorway was near at hand. Martt gazed up the tower's side. A man was up there, behind a parapet, gazing out at the city: a man's head and shoulders, queerly foreshortened. But Martt recognized him.

Rokk!

Martt pushed Zee and Frannie hastily into the tower. He commanded, "You two stay here, with Eeff. I'm going up. You stay here."

Again Martt thought of the drug cylinders he was carrying. He drew them from his pockets, handed them

swiftly to Zee. "Keep these. Whatever happens—if I don't come back—use them. Eeff will lead you home. To Reaf. Ask it if it can lead you."

Zee said, in her own language, "Eeff, come here. Can you lead me back—down there where we met Degg in that place called Reaf? You remember? Where the water was?"

The headless thing turned its eye upon her. It chattered, "Yes, I remember. I can go there—but I want Degg. I want to go back to Degg."

Martt, alone, mounted the circular incline softly, and as swiftly as he dared. Had Rokk seen him? He did not think so. Was Leela up there? . . . If he could get behind Rokk unobserved. . . .

Half-way up there was an oval window in the tower through which Martt caught his first view of the interior of the city.

The sun was sinking at the horizon. The end of the blood-red day! A silence had fallen with the falling sun. A crimson city, strewn with what had once been living, human flesh and blood—dismembered now . . . strewn . . . unnamable. . . .

And climbing the walls, red monsters slithering away—seeking other horrors.

The silent nightfall of the blood-red day.

Martt's gorge rose. He turned from the window, and mounted the incline.

The room at the top was circular, with many windows. An empty room of stone, almost dark, with the starlight streaming in dimly to illumine it.

Martt crept softly. Through a doorway he could see Rokk's figure on the balcony outside. And another figure. Leela, white of face, with her black hair streaming, and her tattered, dirt-stained veiling falling about her. Leela! She was standing, half turned, shuddering with horror. She saw Martt! Surprize, wonderment, joy mirrored her face. His fingers went to his lips warningly. But not quite in time. She uttered a low cry, instantly checked.

Rokk swung about. He, too, saw Martt; he stiffened, with his shoulders flung back against the parapet and his jaw dropping. Martt had instantly leaped, but Rokk met him squarely, surged forward, and they fell.

Rokk was the stronger; Martt knew it at once. He rolled, desperately struggling to come on top, with his legs braced against the floor. But Rokk flung him off and regained his feet.

Instantly Martt was up, quicker, lighter than his antagonist. He struck for Rokk's face, missed and then caught Rokk full on the chest with his fist. The man staggered, but he was not hurt. Rokk's swing went wide, as Martt nimbly ducked. Again they came together. Surged across the balcony, kicking, tearing, seeking each other's throats. Locked, with legs entwined they struck the parapet, rebounded, fell and rolled together to the opposite wall. A primitive struggle of men using only the weapons with which nature had endowed them. Fighting grimly, almost silently, each with no thought but to kill.

Leela, near by, stood helpless, confused, a hand pressed against her mouth in terror. There was a sound, a startled outcry. Frannie and Zee were in the tower room, with Eeff cowering behind them.

Martt momentarily was on top of his adversary, with Rokk's hairy hand beneath his chin, pressing his head back. Martt ripped the hand away. He called, "Run! Run—all of you!"

Rokk heaved him backward, half rose, and surged over on top. Martt saw vaguely another figure appear on the balcony. A heavy, gray-faced woman. He heard Rokk pant, "Mobah!"

The woman leaped upon the scene.

She avoided Zee and Frannie. She strove to get at Martt. She kicked; she tried to strike at him. He heard Zee's voice, "Frannie! Leela! Help me!" As he fought, he was aware that the three girls were pulling at the woman—pulling her away, holding her.

Martt momentarily had slackened his efforts. Rokk's fist caught him in the face, dazed him. Martt felt Rokk lifting him up, heaving him. His body struck the three-foot-wide, level top of the parapet. He clung desperately, as Rokk leaped up to throw him off.

They were locked together, rolling on the parapet top! Martt at its edge, his head momentarily over, felt a wave of heat—saw, far down, the red-yellow glare. Rokk suddenly tried to cast him loose. Then was pushing. They were both lying at the edge.

Scrambling. Panting. And suddenly Zee was up on the parapet, crouching—her frail white hands gouging at Rokk's face. It confused him. He relaxed. Martt gave one last desperate surge. He saw, and felt Rokk's body slipping, sliding over the edge, feet first. Rokk's hold on Martt was torn away, by his own weight and by Zee's frenzied, plucking fingers. His face, close to Martt's for an instant, showed wide, terrified eyes; a mouth that gaped.

His hold broke. His body slid. He was gone! Martt lay panting at the edge, with Zee's steadying grip upon him. A cry sounded. A wail. The woman Mobah had torn loose from Frannie and Leela. She leaped to the parapet. Poised for an instant—a grim, gray statue of despair. Bereft of reason, she called, "Rokk! Rokk!" And with a long, shuddering cry, she plunged.

There was silence for a moment on the parapet. No one looked down. And from over the distant, desolate horizon, presently the red sun came up with the dawn of a new day.

CHAPTER 8

YOUTH!

LIFE is very strange. Brett and I—Frank Elgon of the Interplanetary Mails—of full maturity, at the peak of our physical and mental strength—how inglorious were the parts we played! So inconsequential I scarcely have the heart to recount our futile actions. Yet we thought always that we were doing our best.

We stood there beside the arcade, helplessly watching Frannie and Leela disappear into smallness. Brett left me to guard the spot. He rushed away; came back to tell me that the giant wading in the lake was gone, that he could not find Martt or Zee.

For a time we watched the small pebble beneath which Leela and Frannie had vanished. We even dared to move it carefully, but we could not see them.

The island was emptying of its people. We thought that Martt and Zee might have gone home. We decided to go and join them. Perhaps to take our vehicle, make it small to search for Leela, since we had no drugs.

I told Brett of his father's death. And it was well advanced into the morning before we learned that people on the island had seen Martt and Zee sailing for Reaf. Hours during which we had aimlessly searched, and prepared the vehicle for its trip into smallness to try and find Leela and Frannie.

Martt and Zee had sailed for Reaf! Following the giant! We had thought of doing that, to try and obtain the drugs. But it had seemed reckless, foolhardy, impossible of success. Yet Martt had done it without hesitation. There is a caution comes at thirty which does not hamper twenty-one.

We procured a boat. Provisioned it. And sailed for Reaf, armed with our flash-cylinders. And there we found a huge belt lying on the rocks

near a scattered wreck of buildings strewn upon the water.

Martt's belt, of a size which showed us he had used the drug! He had left the belt to explain that he had gone on to the giant world.

But we were utterly helpless! We could not follow him. We were starting aimlessly toward the river, when along the rocks there, we saw four moving figures. Normal in size. Martt, returning with the three girls! All of them tattered, bruised, blood-stained, their garments dirty and torn. But unharmed.

They waved at us. We landed and ran along the rocks. Martt's smile was tired, but very happy.

"Here they are, Brett. I brought them back—Zee and I did—here they are." He added, "We had a headless thing named Eeff. It led us back, but just now at the last, it ran away. It said it wanted to find Degg. It ran, forgetting it needed the drugs. A half-witted, cowardly sort of thing, but I liked it. Oh, there is so much to tell you——"

Deeds of youth! No caution, no pondering! Glorious deeds of youth, unfettered by maturity! No theory—just accomplishment!

Frannie was saying to me, "Oh Frank——" I held out my hand, but she flung herself upon me. "Frank, I—I've wanted so to get back to you!"

She clung to me. Her arms went around my neck. She was kissing me! Me, Frank Elgon! Poor as a guider of the lower traffic, and just now proved so inglorious of action. But Frannie was kissing me! And whispering, "Oh, Frank, I love you! Don't you know it? Haven't you always known it? You'd never say it to me. Please—please say it now!"

I murmured, "I love you, Frannie!" And held her close. That this could happen to me, ineffectual Frank Elgon!

II

Our last evening in Crescent. We were all going to the Earth—all but old Greedo. Brett and Leela had decided to be married on Earth. Frannie and I also, for Frannie did not seem to care how poor I was. Greedo wanted to go; but he said he was too old. A visit to Earth for his daughters, and then he hoped we would come back. Our last evening. I chanced to go alone to the roof-top of Greedo's home. Its banks of flowers were vivid in the twilight. A breeze rustled the tall potted ferns. The stars overhead were glowing with a silver radiance, mirrored in the distant, placid waters of the lake. Within the house downstairs, Leela's softly singing voice floated up.

Two figures sat in the starlight, among the flowers. Zee and Martt; close together, with his arm around her, and her head against his side, the tangle of her dark hair enveloping him.

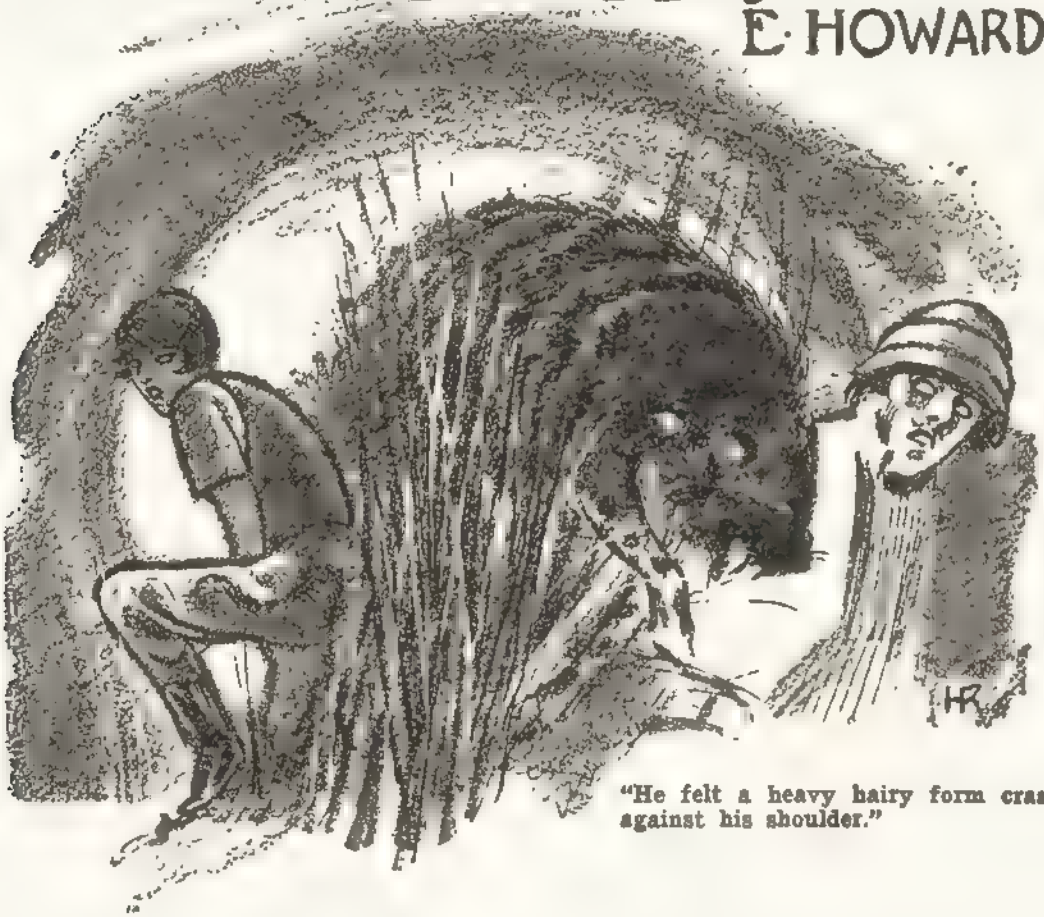
I heard him say, awkwardly but very tenderly, "Three couples can be married at once, on Earth, Zee. Let's do that. Shall we?"

And heard her answering whisper, "Yes. Let's."

I tiptoed silently away.

[THE END]

THE HYENA by ROBERT E. HOWARD



"He felt a heavy hairy form crash against his shoulder."

FROM the time when I first saw Senecoza, the fetish-man, I distrusted him, and from vague distrust the idea eventually grew into hatred.

I was but newly come to the East Coast, new to African ways, somewhat inclined to follow my impulses, and possessed of a large amount of curiosity.

Because I came from Virginia, race instinct and prejudice were strong in me, and doubtless the feeling of inferiority which Senecoza constantly inspired in me had a great deal to do with my antipathy for him.

He was surprizingly tall, and leanly built. Six inches above six feet he stood, and so muscular was his spare frame that he weighed a good two hundred pounds. His weight seemed incredible when one looked at his lanky build, but he was all muscle—a lean, black giant. His features were not pure negro. They more resembled Berber than Bantu, with the high, bulging forehead, thin nose and thin, straight lips. But his hair was as kinky as a Bushman's and his color was blacker even than the Masai. In fact, his glossy hide had a different hue from those of the native tribesmen, and I believe that he was of a different tribe.

It was seldom that we of the ranch saw him. Then without warning he

would be among us, or we would see him striding through the shoulder-high grass of the veldt, sometimes alone, sometimes followed at a respectful distance by several of the wilder Masai, who bunched up at a distance from the buildings, grasping their spears nervously and eyeing everyone suspiciously. He would make his greetings with a courtly grace; his manner was deferentially courteous, but somehow it "rubbed me the wrong way," so to speak. I always had a vague feeling that the black was mocking us. He would stand before us, a naked bronze giant; make trade for a few simple articles, such as a copper kettle, beads or a trade musket; repeat the words of some chief, and take his departure.

I did not like him. And being young and impetuous, I spoke my opinion to Ludtvik Strolvaus, a very distant relative, tenth cousin or suchlike, on whose trading-post ranch I was staying.

But Ludtvik chuckled in his blond beard and said that the fetish-man was all right.

"A power he is among the natives, true. They all fear him. But a friend he is to the whites. *Ja.*"

Ludtvik was long a resident on the East Coast; he knew natives and he knew the fat Australian cattle he raised, but he had little imagination.

The ranch buildings were in the midst of a stockade, on a kind of slope, overlooking countless miles on miles of the finest grazing land in Africa. The stockade was large, well suited for defense. Most of the thousand cattle could be driven inside in case of an uprising of the Masai. Ludtvik was inordinately proud of his cattle.

"One thousand now," he would tell me, his round face beaming, "one thousand now. But later, ah! ten thousand and another ten thousand. This a good beginning, but only a beginning. *Ja.*"

I must confess that I got little thrill out of the cattle. Natives herded and corralled them; all Ludtvik and I had to do was to ride about and give orders. That was the work he liked best, and I left it mostly to him.

My chief sport was in riding away across the veldt, alone or attended by a gun-bearer, with a rifle. Not that I ever bagged much game. In the first place I was an execrable marksman; I could hardly have hit an elephant at close range. In the second place, it seemed to me a shame to shoot so many things. A bush-antelope would bound up in front of me and race away, and I would sit watching him, admiring the slim, lithe figure, thrilled with the graceful beauty of the creature, my rifle lying idle across my saddle-horn.

The native boy who served as my gun-bearer began to suspect that I was deliberately refraining from shooting, and he began in a covert way to throw sneering hints about my womanishness. I was young and valued even the opinion of a native; which is very foolish. His remarks stung my pride, and one day I hauled him off his horse and pounded him until he yelled for mercy. Thereafter my doings were not questioned.

But still I felt inferior when in the presence of the fetish-man. I could not get the other natives to talk about him. All I could get out of them was a scared rolling of eyeballs, gesticulation indicative of fear, and vague information that the fetish-man dwelt among the tribes some distance in the interior. General opinion seemed to be that Senecoza was a good man to let alone.

One incident made the mystery about the fetish-man take on, it seemed, a rather sinister form.

In the mysterious way that news travels in Africa, and which white men so seldom hear of, we learned that Senecoza and a minor chief had had a falling out of some kind. It was vague and seemed to have no

especial basis of fact. But shortly afterward that chief was found half-devoured by hyenas. That, in itself, was not unusual, but the fright with which the natives heard the news was. The chief was nothing to them; in fact he was something of a villain, but his killing seemed to inspire them with a fright that was little short of homicidal. When the black reaches a certain stage of fear, he is as dangerous as a cornered panther. The next time Senecoza called, they rose and fled en masse and did not return until he had taken his departure.

Between the fear of the blacks, the tearing to pieces of the chief by the hyenas, and the fetish-man, I seemed to sense vaguely a connection of some kind. But I could not grasp the intangible thought.

Not long thereafter, that thought was intensified by another incident. I had ridden far out on the veldt, accompanied by my servant. As we paused to rest our horses close to a kopje, I saw, upon the top, a hyena eyeing us. Rather surprized, for the beasts are not in the habit of thus boldly approaching man in the daytime, I raised my rifle and was taking a steady aim, for I always hated the things, when my servant caught my arm.

"No shoot, *bwana!* No shoot!" he exclaimed hastily, jabbering a great deal in his own language, with which I was not familiar.

"What's up?" I asked impatiently.

He kept on jabbering and pulling my arm, until I gathered that the hyena was a fetish-beast of some kind.

"Oh, all right," I conceded, lowering my rifle just as the hyena turned and sauntered out of sight.

Something about the lank, repulsive beast and his shambling yet gracefully lithe walk struck my sense of humor with a ludicrous comparison.

Laughing, I pointed toward the beast and said, "That fellow looks like a hyena-imitation of Senecoza, the fetish-man." My simple statement seemed to throw the native into a more abject fear than ever.

He turned his pony and dashed off in the general direction of the ranch, looking back at me with a seared face.

I followed, annoyed. And as I rode I pondered. Hyenas, a fetish-man, a chief torn to pieces, a countryside of natives in fear; what was the connection? I puzzled and puzzled, but I was new to Africa; I was young and impatient, and presently with a shrug of annoyance I discarded the whole problem.

The next time Senecoza came to the ranch, he managed to stop directly in front of me. For a fleeting instant his glittering eyes looked into mine. And in spite of myself, I shuddered and stepped back, involuntarily, feeling much as a man feels who looks unaware into the eyes of a serpent. There was nothing tangible, nothing on which I could base a quarrel, but there was a distinct threat. Before my Nordic pugnacity could reassert itself, he was gone. I said nothing. But I knew that Senecoza hated me for some reason and that he plotted my killing. Why, I did not know.

As for me, my distrust grew into bewildered rage, which in turn become hate.

And then Ellen Farel came to the ranch. Why she should choose a trading-ranch in East Africa for a place to rest from the society life of New York, I do not know. Africa is no place for a woman. That is what Ludtvik, also a cousin of hers, told her, but he was overjoyed to see her. As for me, girls never interested me much; usually I felt like a fool in their presence and was glad to be out. But there were few whites in the vicinity and I tired of the company of Ludtvik.

ELLEN was standing on the wide veranda when I first saw her, a slim, pretty young thing, with rosy cheeks and hair like gold and large gray eyes. She was surprizingly winsome in her costume of riding-breeches, puttees, jacket and light helmet.

I felt extremely awkward, dusty and stupid as I sat on my wiry African pony and stared at her.

She saw a stocky youth of medium height, with sandy hair, eyes in which a kind of gray predominated; an ordinary, unhandsome youth, clad in dusty riding-clothes and a cartridge belt on one side of which was slung an ancient Colt of big caliber, and on the other a long, wicked hunting-knife.

I dismounted, and she came forward, hand outstretched.

"I'm Ellen," she said, "and I know you're Steve. Cousin Ludtvik has been telling me about you."

I shook hands, surprized at the thrill the mere touch of her hand gave me.

She was enthusiastic about the ranch. She was enthusiastic about everything. Seldom have I seen anyone who had more vigor and vim, more enjoyment of everything done. She fairly scintillated with mirth and gayety.

Ludtvik gave her the best horse on the place, and we rode much about the ranch and over the veldt.

The blacks interested her much. They were afraid of her, not being used to white women. She would have been off her horse and playing with the pickaninnies if I had let her. She couldn't understand why she should treat the black people as dust beneath her feet. We had long arguments about it. I could not convince her, so I told her bluntly that she didn't know anything about it and she must do as I told her.

She pouted her pretty lips and called me a tyrant, and then was off over the veldt like an antelope, laughing at me over her shoulder, her hair blowing free in the breeze.

Tyrant! I was her slave from the first. Somehow the idea of becoming a lover never entered my mind. It was not the fact that she was several years older than I, or that she had a sweetheart (several of them, I think) back in New York. Simply, I worshiped her; her presence intoxicated me, and I could think of no more enjoyable existence than serving her as a devoted slave.

I was mending a saddle one day when she came running in.

"Oh, Steve!" she called; "there's the most romantic-looking savage! Come quick and tell me what his name is."

She led me out of the veranda.

"There he is," she said, naïvely pointing. Arms folded, haughty head thrown back, stood Senecoza.

Ludtvik, who was talking to him, paid no attention to the girl until he had completed his business with the fetish-man; and then, turning, he took her arm and they went into the house together.

Again I was face to face with the savage; but this time he was not looking at me. With a rage amounting almost to madness, I saw that he was gazing after the girl. There was an expression in his serpentlike eyes——

On the instant my gun was out and leveled. My hand shook like a leaf with the intensity of my fury. Surely I must shoot Senecoza down like the snake he was, shoot him down and riddle him, shoot him into a shredded heap!

The fleeting expression left his eyes and they were fixed on me. Detached they seemed, inhuman in their sardonic calm. And I could not pull the trigger.

For a moment we stood, and then he turned and strode away, a magnificent figure, while I glared after him and snarled with helpless fury.

I sat down on the veranda. What a man of mystery was that savage! What strange power did he possess? Was I right, I wondered, in interpreting the fleeting expression as he gazed after the girl? It seemed to me, in my youth and folly, incredible that a black man, no matter what his rank, should look at a white woman as he did. Most astonishing of all, why could I not shoot him down?

I started as a hand touched my arm.

"What are you thinking about, Steve?" asked Ellen, laughing. Then before I could say anything, "Wasn't that chief, or whatever he was, a fine specimen of a savage? He invited us to come to his kraal; is that what you call it? It's away off in the veldt somewhere, and we're going."

"No!" I exclaimed violently, springing up.

"Why, Steve," she gasped, recoiling, "how rude! He's a perfect gentleman, isn't he, Cousin Ludtvik?"

"*Ja,*" nodded Ludtvik, placidly, "we go to his kraal sometime soon, maybe. A strong chief, that savage. His chief has perhaps good trade."

"No!" I repeated, furiously. "*I'll* go if somebody has to! Ellen's not going near that beast!"

"Well, that's nice!" remarked Ellen, somewhat indignantly. "I guess you're my boss, mister man?"

With all her sweetness, she had a mind of her own. In spite of all I could do, they arranged to go to the fetish-man's village the next day.

That night the girl came out to me, where I sat on the veranda in the moonlight, and she sat down on the arm of my chair.

"You're not angry at me, are you, Steve?" she said wistfully, putting her arm around my shoulders. "Not mad, are you?"

Mad? Yes, maddened by the touch of her soft body—such mad devotion as a slave feels. I wanted to grovel in the dust at her feet and kiss her dainty shoes. Will women never learn the effect they have on men?

I took her hand and hesitantly pressed it to my lips. I think she must have sensed some of my devotion.

"Dear Steve," she murmured, and the words were like a caress, "come, let's walk in the moonlight."

We walked outside the stockade. I should have known better, for I had no weapon but the big Turkish dagger I carried and used for a hunting-knife, but she wished to.

"Tell me about this Senecoza," she asked, and I welcomed the opportunity. And then I thought: what could I tell her? That hyenas had eaten a small chief of the Masai? That the natives feared the fetish-man? That he had looked at her?

And then the girl screamed as out of the tall grass leaped a vague shape, half-seen in the moonlight.

I felt a heavy, hairy form crash against my shoulders; keen fangs ripped my upflung arm. I went to the earth, fighting with frenzied horror. My jacket was slit to ribbons and the fangs were at my throat before I found and drew my knife and stabbed, blindly and savagely. I felt my blade rip into my foe, and then, like a shadow, it was gone. I staggered to my feet, somewhat shaken. The girl caught and steadied me.

"What was it?" she gasped, leading me toward the stockade.

"A hyena," I answered. "I could tell by the scent. But I never heard of one attacking like that."

She shuddered. Later on, after my torn arm had been bandaged, she came close to me and said in a wondrously subdued voice, "Steve, I've decided not to go to the village, if you don't want me to."

After the wounds on my arm had became scars Ellen and I resumed our rides, as might be ex-

pected. One day we had wandered rather far out on the veldt, and she challenged me to a race. Her horse easily distanced mine, and she stopped and waited for me, laughing.

She had stopped on a sort of kopje, and she pointed to a clump of trees some distance away.

"Trees!" she said gleefully. "Let's ride down there. There are so few trees on the veldt."

And she dashed away. I followed some instinctive caution, loosening my pistol in its holster, and, drawing my knife, I thrust it down in my boot so that it was entirely concealed.

We were perhaps half-way to the trees when from the tall grass about us leaped Senecoza and some twenty warriors.

One seized the girl's bridle and the others rushed me. The one who caught at Ellen went down with a bullet between his eyes, and another crumpled at my second shot. Then a thrown war-club hurled me from the saddle, half senseless, and as the blacks closed in on me I saw Ellen's horse, driven frantic by the prick of a carelessly handled spear, scream and rear, scattering the blacks who held her, and dash away at headlong speed, the bit in her teeth.

I saw Senecoza leap on my horse and give chase, flinging a savage command over his shoulder; and both vanished over the kopje.

The warriors bound me hand and foot and carried me into the trees. A hut stood among them—a native hut of thatch and bark. Somehow the sight of it set me shuddering. It seemed to lurk, repellent and indescribably malevolent amongst the trees; to hint of horrid and obscene rites; of voodoo.

I know not why it is, but the sight of a native hut, alone and hidden, far from a village or tribe, always has to me a suggestion of nameless horror. Perhaps that is because only a black who is crazed or one who is so criminal that he has been exiled by his tribe will dwell that way.

In front of the hut they threw me down.

"When Senecoza returns with the girl," said they, "you will enter." And they laughed like fiends. Then, leaving one black to see that I did not escape, they left.

The black who remained kicked me viciously; he was a bestial-looking negro, armed with a trade-musket.

"They go to kill white men, fool!" he mocked me. "They go to the ranches and trading-posts, first to that fool of an Englishman." Meaning Smith, the owner of a neighboring ranch.

And he went on giving details. Senecoza had made the plot, he boasted. They would chase all the white men to the coast.

"Senecoza is more than a man," he boasted. "You shall see, white man," lowering his voice and glancing about him, from beneath his low, beetling brows; "you shall see the magic of Senecoza." And he grinned, disclosing teeth filed to points.

"Cannibal!" I ejaculated, involuntarily. "A Masai?"

"No," he answered. "A man of Senecoza."

"Who will kill no white men," I jeered.

He scowled savagely. "I will kill you, white man."

"You dare not."

"That is true," he admitted, and added angrily, "Senecoza will kill you himself."

And meantime Ellen was riding like mad, gaining on the fetish-man, but unable to ride toward the ranch, for he had gotten between and was forcing her steadily out upon the veldt.

The black unfastened my bonds. His line of reasoning was easy to see; absurdly easy. He could not kill a prisoner of the fetish-man, but he could kill him to prevent his escape. And he was maddened with the

blood-lust. Stepping back, he half-raised his trade-musket, watching me as a snake watches a rabbit.

It must have been about that time, as she afterward told me, that Ellen's horse stumbled and threw her. Before she could rise, the black had leaped from his horse and seized her in his arms. She screamed and fought, but he gripped her, held her helpless and laughed at her. Tearing her jacket to pieces, he bound her arms and legs, remounted and started back, carrying the half-fainting girl in front of him.

Back in front of the hut I rose slowly. I rubbed my arms where the ropes had been, moved a little closer to the black, stretched, stooped and rubbed my legs; then with a catlike bound I was on him, my knife flashing from my boot. The trade-musket crashed and the charge whizzed above my head as I knocked up the barrel and closed with him. Hand to hand, I would have been no match for the black giant; but I had the knife. Clinched close together we were too close for him to use the trade-musket for a club. He wasted time trying to do that, and with a desperate effort I threw him off his balance and drove the dagger to the hilt in his black chest.

I wrenched it out again; I had no other weapon, for I could find no more ammunition for the trade-musket.

I had no idea which way Ellen had fled. I assumed she had gone toward the ranch, and in that direction I took my way. Smith must be warned. The warriors were far ahead of me. Even then they might be creeping up about the unsuspecting ranch.

I had not covered a fourth of the distance, when a drumming of hoofs behind me caused me to turn my head. Ellen's horse was thundering toward me, riderless. I caught her as she raced past me, and managed to stop her. The story was plain. The girl had either reached a place of safety and had turned the horse loose, or what was much more likely, had been captured, the horse escaping and fleeing toward the ranch, as a horse will do. I gripped the saddle, torn with indecision. Finally I leaped on the horse and sent her flying toward Smith's ranch. It was not many miles; Smith must not be massacred by those black devils, and I must find a gun if I expected to rescue the girl from Senecoza.

A HALF-MILE from Smith's I overtook the raiders and went through them like drifting smoke. The workers at Smith's place were startled by a wild-riding horseman charging headlong into the stockade, shouting, "Masai! Masai! A raid, you fools!" snatching a gun and flying out again.

So when the savages arrived they found everybody ready for them, and they got such a warm reception that after one attempt they turned tail and fled back across the veldt.

And I was riding as I never rode before. The mare was almost exhausted, but I pushed her mercilessly. On, on!

I aimed for the only place I knew likely. The hut among the trees. I assumed that the fetish-man would return there.

And long before the hut came into sight, a horseman dashed from the grass, going at right angles to my course, and our horses, colliding, sent both tired animals to the ground.

"Steve!" It was a cry of joy mingled with fear. Ellen lay, tied hand and foot, gazing up at me wildly as I regained my feet.

Senecoza came with a rush, his long knife flashing in the sunlight. Back and forth we fought—slash, ward and parry, my ferocity and agility matching his savagery and skill.

A terrific lunge which he aimed at me, I caught on my point, laying his arm open, and then with a quick engage and wrench, disarmed him. But

before I could use my advantage, he sprang away into the grass and vanished.

I caught up the girl, slashing her bonds, and she clung to me, poor child, until I lifted her and carried her toward the horses. But we were not yet through with Senecoza. He must have had a rifle cached away somewhere in the bush, for the first I knew of him was when a bullet spat within a foot above my head.

I caught at the bridles, and then I saw that the mare had done all she could, temporarily. She was exhausted. I swung Ellen up on the horse.

"Ride for our ranch," I ordered her. "The raiders are out, but you can get through. Ride low and ride fast!"

"But you, Steve!"

"Go, go!" I ordered, swinging her horse around and starting it. She dashed away, looking at me wistfully over her shoulder. Then I snatched the rifle and a handful of cartridges I had gotten at Smith's, and took to the bush. And through that hot African day, Senecoza and I played a game of hide-and-seek. Crawling, slipping in and out of the scanty veldt-bushes, crouching in the tall grass, we traded shots back and forth. A movement of the grass, a snapping twig, the rasp of grass-blades, and a bullet came questing, another answering it.

I HAD but a few cartridges and I fired carefully, but presently I pushed my one remaining cartridge into the rifle—a big, six-bore, single-barrel breech-loader, for I had not had time to pick when I snatched it up.

I crouched in my covert and watched for the black to betray himself by a careless movement. Not a sound, not a whisper among the grasses. Away off over the veldt a hyena sounded his fiendish laugh and another answered, closer at hand. The cold sweat broke out on my brow.

What was that? A drumming of many horses' hoofs! Raiders returning? I ventured a look and could have shouted for joy. At least twenty men were sweeping toward me, white men and ranch-boys, and ahead of them all rode Ellen! They were still some distance away. I darted behind a tall bush and rose, waving my hand to attract their attention.

They shouted and pointed to something beyond me. I whirled and saw, some thirty yards away, a huge hyena slinking toward me, rapidly. I glanced carefully across the veldt. Somewhere out there, hidden by the billowing grasses, lurked Senecoza. A shot would betray to him my position—and I had but one cartridge. The rescue party was still out of range.

I looked again at the hyena. He was still rushing toward me. There was no doubt as to his intentions. His eyes glittered like a fiend's from hell, and a scar on his shoulder showed him to be the same beast that had once before attacked me. Then a kind of horror took hold of me, and resting the old elephant rifle over my elbow, I sent my last bullet crashing through the bestial thing. With a scream that seemed to have a horribly human note in it, the hyena turned and fled back into the bush, reeling as it ran.

And the rescue party swept up around me.

A fusillade of bullets crashed through the bush from which Senecoza had sent his last shot. There was no reply.

"Ve hunt ter snake down," quoth Cousin Ludtvik, his Boer accent increasing with his excitement. And we scattered through the veldt in a skirmish line, combing every inch of it warily.

Not a trace of the fetish-man did we find. A rifle we found, empty, with empty shells scattered about, and (which was very strange) *hyena tracks leading away from the rifle.*

I felt the short hairs of my neck bristle with intangible horror. We looked at each other, and said not a word, as with a tacit agreement we took up the trail of the hyena.

We followed it as it wound in and out in the shoulder-high grass, showing how it had slipped up on me, stalking me as a tiger stalks its victim. We struck the trail the thing had made, returning to the bush after I had shot it. Splashes of blood marked the way it had taken. We followed.

"It leads toward the fetish-hut," muttered an Englishman. "Here, sirs, is a damnable mystery."

And Cousin Ludtvik ordered Ellen to stay back, leaving two men with her.

We followed the trail over the kopje and into the clump of trees. Straight to the door of the hut it led. We circled the hut cautiously, but no tracks led away. It was inside the hut. Rifles ready, we forced the rude door.

No tracks led away from the hut and no tracks led to it except the tracks of the hyena. Yet there was no hyena within that hut; and on the dirt floor, a bullet through his black breast, lay Senecoza, the fetish-man.

WEIRD STORY REPRINT

Legend of the Moor's Legacy

By WASHINGTON IRVING

JUST within the fortress of the Alhambra, in front of the royal palace, is a broad open esplanade, called the place or square of the cisterns, so called from being undermined by reservoirs of water, hidden from sight, which have existed from the time of the Moors. At one corner of this esplanade is a Moorish well, cut through the living rock to a great depth, the water of which is cold as ice and clear as crystal. The wells made by the Moors are always in repute, for it is well known what pains they took to penetrate to the purest and sweetest springs and fountains. The one we are speaking of is famous through Granada, insomuch that the water-carriers, some bearing great water-jars on their shoulders, others driving asses before them, laden with earthen vessels, are ascending and descending the steep woody avenues of the Alhambra from early dawn until a late hour of the night.

Fountains and wells, ever since the scriptural days, have been noted gossiping-places in hot climates, and at the well in question there is a kind of perpetual club kept up during the livelong day, by the invalids, old women, and other curious, do-nothing folk of the fortress, who sit here on

the stone benches under an awning spread over the well to shelter the toll-gatherer from the sun, and dawdle over the gossip of the fortress, and question any water-carrier that arrives about the news of the city, and make long comments on everything they hear and see. Not an hour of the day but loitering housewives and idle maid-servants may be seen, lingering with pitcher on head or in hand, to hear the last of the endless tattle of these worthies.

Among the water-carriers who once resorted to this well there was a sturdy, strong-backed, bandy-legged little fellow, named Pedro Gil, but called Peregil for shortness. Being a water-carrier, he was a Gallego, or native of Galicia, of course. Nature seems to have formed races of men as she has of animals for different kinds of drudgery. In France the shoeblacks are all Savoyards, the porters of hotels all Swiss, and in the days of hoops and hair-powder in England no man could give the regular swing to a sedan chair but a bog-trotting Irishman. So in Spain the carriers of water and bearers of burdens are all sturdy little natives of Galicia. No man says, "get me a porter," but, "call a Gallego."

To return from this digression. Peregil the Gallego had begun business with merely a great earthen jar, which he carried upon his shoulder; by degrees he rose in the world, and was enabled to purchase an assistant of a correspondent class of animals, being a stout shaggy-haired donkey. On each side of this his long-eared aide-de-camp, in a kind of pannier, were slung his water-jars covered with fig leaves to protect them from the sun. There was not a more industrious water-carrier in all Granada, nor one more merry withal. The streets rang with his cheerful voice as he trudged after his donkey, singing forth the usual summer note that resounds through the Spanish towns: "Who wants water—water colder than snow—who wants water from the well of the Alhambra—cold as ice and clear as crystal?" When he served a customer with a sparkling glass, it was always with a pleasant word that caused a smile, and if, perchance, it was a comely dame, or dimpling damsel, it was always with a sly leer and a compliment to her beauty that was irresistible. Thus Peregil the Gallego was noted throughout all Granada for being one of the civilest, pleasantest, and happiest of mortals. Yet it is not he who sings loudest and jokes most that has the lightest heart. Under all this air of merriment, honest Peregil had his cares and troubles. He had a large family of ragged children to support, who were hungry and clamorous as a nest of young swallows, and beset him with their outcries for food whenever he came home of an evening. He had a helpmate, too, who was anything but a help to him. She had been a village beauty before marriage, noted for her skill in dancing the bolero and rattling the castanets, and she still retained her early propensities, spending the hard earnings of honest Peregil in frippery, and laying the very donkey under requisition for junketing parties into the country on Sundays, and saints' days, and those innumerable holydays which are rather more numerous in Spain than the days of the week. With all this she was a little of a slattern, something more than a lie-a-bed, and, above all, a gossip of the first water; neglecting house, household and everything else, to loiter slipshod in the houses of her gossip neighbors.

He, however, who tempers the wind to the shorn lamb, accommodates the yoke of matrimony to the submissive neck. Peregil bore all the heavy dispensations of wife and children with as meek a spirit as his donkey bore the water-jars; and, however he might shake his ears in private, never

ventured to question the household virtues of his slattern spouse.

He loved his children too, even as an owl loves its owlets, seeing in them his own image multiplied and perpetuated, for they were a sturdy, long-backed, bandy-legged little brood. The great pleasure of honest Peregil was, whenever he could afford himself a scanty holyday and had a handful of maravedies to spare, to take the whole litter forth with him, some in his arms, some tugging at his skirts, and some trudging at his heels, and to treat them to a gambol among the orchards of the Vega, while his wife was dancing with her holyday friends in the Angosturas or the Darro.

It was a late hour one summer night, and most of the water-carriers had desisted from their toils. The day had been uncommonly sultry; the night was one of those delicious moonlights, which tempt the inhabitants of those southern climes to indemnify themselves for the heat and inaction of the day by lingering in the open air and enjoying its tempered sweetness until after midnight. Customers for water were therefore still abroad. Peregil, like a considerate, painstaking little father, thought of his hungry children. "One more journey to the well," said he to himself, "to earn a good Sunday's *puchero* for the little ones." So saying, he trudged rapidly up the steep avenue of the Alhambra, singing as he went, and now and then bestowing a hearty thwack with a cudgel on the flanks of his donkey, either by way of cadence to the song, or refreshment to the animal; for dry blows serve in lieu of provender in Spain, for all beasts of burden.

When arrived at the well, he found it deserted by everyone except a solitary stranger in Moorish garb, seated on the stone bench in the moonlight. Peregil paused at first, and regarded him with surprize, not unmixed with awe, but the Moor feebly beckoned him to approach.

"I am faint and ill," said he; "aid me to return to the city, and I will pay thee double what thou couldst gain by thy jars of water."

The honest heart of the little water-carrier was touched with compassion at the appeal of the stranger. "God forbid," said he, "that I should ask fee or reward for doing a common act of humanity."

He accordingly helped the Moor on his donkey, and set off slowly for Granada, the poor Moslem being so weak that it was necessary to hold him on the animal to keep him from falling to the earth.

When they entered the city, the water-carrier demanded whither he should conduct him. "Alas!" said the Moor, faintly, "I have neither home nor habitation. I am a stranger in the land. Suffer me to lay my head this night beneath thy roof and thou shall be amply repaid."

Honest Peregil thus saw himself unexpectedly saddled with an infidel guest, but he was too humane to refuse a night's shelter to a fellow being in so forlorn a plight; so he conducted the Moor to his dwelling. The children, who had sallied forth, open-mouthed as usual, on hearing the tramp of the donkey, ran back with affright when they beheld the turbaned stranger, and hid themselves behind their mother. The latter stepped forth intrepidly, like a ruffling hen before her brood when a vagrant dog approaches.

"What infidel companion," cried she, "is this you have brought home at this late hour, to draw upon us the eyes of the Inquisition?"

"Be quiet, wife," replied the Gallego; "here is a poor sick stranger, without friend or home; wouldst thou turn him forth to perish in the streets?"

The wife would still have remonstrated, for, though she lived in a hovel, she was a furious stickler for the credit of her house; the little water-carrier, however, for once was stiff-necked, and refused to bend beneath the yoke. He assisted the poor Moslem to alight, and spread a mat and a sheepskin for him, on the ground, in the coolest part of the house; being the only kind of bed that his poverty afforded.

In a little while the Moor was seized with violent convulsions, which defied all the ministering skill of the simple water-carrier. The eye of the poor patient acknowledged his kindness. During an interval of his fits he called him to his side, and addressing him in a low voice: "My end," said he, "I fear is at hand. If I die I bequeath you this box as a reward for your charity." So saying, he opened his *albornoz,* or cloak, and showed a small box of sandalwood, strapped round his body.

"God grant, my friend," replied the worthy little Gallego, "that you may live many years to enjoy your treasure, whatever it may be."

The Moor shook his head; he laid his hand upon the box, and would have said something more concerning it, but his convulsions returned with increased violence, and in a little while he expired.

The water-carrier's wife was now as one distracted. "This comes," said she, "of your foolish good nature, always running into scrapes to oblige others. What will become of us when this corpse is found in our house? We shall be sent to prison as murderers; and if we escape with our lives, shall be ruined by notaries and alguazils."

Poor Peregil was in equal tribulation, and almost repented himself of having done a good deed. At length a thought struck him. "It is not yet day," said he. "I can convey the dead body out of the city and bury it in the sands on the banks of the Xenil. No one saw the Moor enter our dwelling and no one will know anything of his death." So said, so done. The wife aided him. They rolled the body of the unfortunate Moslem in the mat on which he had expired, laid it across the ass, and Peregil set out with it for the banks of the river.

As ill luck would have it, there lived opposite to the water-carrier a barber, named Pedrillo Pedrugo, one of the most prying, tattling, mischief-making of his gossip tribe. He was a weasel-faced, spider-legged varlet, supple and insinuating; the famous Barber of Seville could not surpass him for his universal knowledge of the affairs of others, and he had no more power of retention than a sieve. It was said that he slept with but one eye at a time, and kept one ear uncovered, so that, even in his sleep, he might see and hear all that was going on. Certain it is, he was a sort of scandalous chronicle for the quidnuncs of Granada, and had more customers than all the rest of his fraternity.

This meddlesome barber heard Peregil arrive at an unusual hour of night, and the exclamations of his wife and children. His head was instantly popped out of a little window which served him as a lookout, and he saw his neighbor assist a man in a Moorish garb into his dwelling. This was so strange an occurrence that Pedrillo Pedrugo slept not a wink that night—every five minutes he was at his loop-hole, watching the lights that gleamed through the chinks of his neighbor's door, and before daylight he beheld Peregil sally forth with his donkey unusually laden.

The inquisitive barber was in a fidget; he slipped on his clothes, and, stealing forth silently, followed the water-carrier at a distance, until he saw him dig a hole in the sandy bank of the Xenil, and bury something that had the appearance of a dead body.

The barber hied him home and fidgeted about his shop, setting everything upside down, until sunrise. He then took a basin under his arm, and sallied forth to the house of his daily customer, the alcalde.

The alcalde was just risen. Pedrillo Pedrugo seated him in a chair, threw a napkin round his neck, put a basin of hot water under his chin, and began to mollify his beard with his fingers.

"Strange doings," said Pedrugo, who played barber and newsmonger at the same time. "Strange doings! Robbery, and murder, and burial, all in one night!"

"Hey? how? What is it you say?" cried the alcalde.

"I say," replied the barber, rubbing a piece of soap over the nose and mouth of the dignitary, for a Spanish barber disdains to employ a brush; "I say that Peregil the Gallego has robbed and murdered a Moorish Mussulman, and buried him this blessed night, accursed be the night for the same!"

"But how do you know all this?" demanded the alcalde.

"Be patient, *Señor*, and you shall hear all about it," replied Pedrillo, taking him by the nose and sliding a razor over his cheek. He then recounted all that he had seen, going through both operations at the same time, shaving his beard, washing his chin, and wiping him dry with a dirty napkin, while he was robbing, murdering and burying the Moslem.

Now it so happened that this alcalde was one of the most overbearing, and at the same time most griping and corrupt curmudgeons in all Granada. It could not be denied, however, that he set a high value upon justice, for he sold it at its weight in gold. He presumed the case in point to be one of murder and robbery; doubtless there must be rich spoil; how was it to be secured into the legitimate hands of the law? For as to merely entrapping the delinquent—that would be feeding the gallows; but entrapping the booty—that would be enriching the judge; and such, according to his creed, was the great end of justice. So thinking, he summoned to his presence his trustiest alguazil; a gaunt, hungry-looking varlet, clad, according to the custom of his order, in the ancient Spanish garb—a broad black beaver, turned up at the sides; a quaint ruff, a small black cloak dangling from his shoulders; rusty black underclothes that set off his spare wiry form; while in his hand he bore a slender white wand, the dreaded insignia of his office. Such was the legal bloodhound of the ancient Spanish breed that he put upon the traces of the unlucky water-carrier; and such was his speed and certainty that he was upon the haunches of poor Peregil before he had returned to his dwelling, and brought both him and his donkey before the dispenser of justice.

The alcalde bent upon him one of his most terrific frowns. "Hark ye, culprit," roared he in a voice that made the knees of the little Gallego smite together. "Hark ye, culprit! there is no need of denying thy guilt: everything is known to me. A gallows is the proper reward for the crime thou hast committed, but I am merciful, and readily listen to reason. The man that has been murdered in thy house was a Moor, an infidel, the enemy of our faith. It was doubtless in a fit of religious zeal that thou hast slain him. I will be indulgent, therefore; render up the property of which thou hast robbed him, and we will hush the matter up."

The poor water-carrier called upon all the saints to witness his innocence; alas! not one of them appeared, and if there had, the alcalde would have disbelieved the whole calendar. The water-carrier related the whole story of the dying Moor with the straight-

forward simplicity of truth, but it was all in vain. "Wilt thou persist in saying," demanded the judge, "that this Moslem had neither gold nor jewels, which were the object of thy cupidity?"

"As I hope to be saved, your worship," replied the water-carrier, "he had nothing but a small box of sandalwood, which he bequeathed to me in reward of my services."

"A box of sandalwood! a box of sandalwood!" exclaimed the alcalde, his eyes sparkling at the idea of precious jewels, "and where is this box? where have you concealed it?"

"An' it please your grace," replied the water-carrier, "it is in one of the panniers of my mule, and heartily at the service of your worship."

He had hardly spoken the words than the keen alguazil darted off and reappeared in an instant with the mysterious box of sandalwood. The alcalde opened it with an eager and trembling hand; all pressed forward to gaze upon the treasures it was expected to contain; when, to their disappointment, nothing appeared within but a parchment scroll, covered with Arabic characters, and an end of a waxen taper!

When there is nothing to be gained by the conviction of a prisoner, justice, even in Spain, is apt to be impartial. The alcalde, having recovered from his disappointment and found there was really no booty in the case, now listened dispassionately to the explanation of the water-carrier, which was corroborated by the testimony of his wife. Being convinced, therefore, of his innocence, he discharged him from arrest; nay, more, he permitted him to carry off the Moor's legacy, the box of sandalwood and its contents, as the well-merited reward of his humanity; but he retained his donkey in payment of cost and charges.

Behold the unfortunate little Gallego reduced once more to the necessity of being his own water-carrier, and trudging up to the well of the Alhambra with a great earthen jar upon his shoulder. As he toiled up the hill in the heat of a summer noon his usual good-humor forsook him. "Dog of an alcalde!" would he cry, "to rob a poor man of the means of his subsistence—of the best friend he had in the world!" And then, at the remembrance of the beloved companion of his labors, all the kindness of his nature would break forth. "Ah, donkey of my heart!" would he exclaim, resting his burden on a stone, and wiping the sweat from his brow, "ah, donkey of my heart! I warrant me thou thinkest of thy old master! I warrant me thou missest the water-jars—poor beast!"

To add to his afflictions his wife received him, on his return home, with whimperings and repinings; she had clearly the vantage-ground of him, having warned him not to commit the egregious act of hospitality that had brought on him all these misfortunes, and like a knowing woman, she took every occasion to throw her superior sagacity in his teeth. If ever her children lacked food, or needed a new garment, she would answer with a sneer, "Go to your father; he's heir to King Chico of the Alhambra. Ask him to help you out of the Moor's strong-box."

Was ever poor mortal more soundly punished for having done a good action! The unlucky Peregil was grieved in flesh and spirit, but still he bore meekly with the railings of his spouse. At length one evening, when, after a hot day's toil, she taunted him in the usual manner, he lost all patience. He did not venture to retort upon her, but his eye rested upon the box of sandalwood, which lay on a shelf with lid half open, as if laughing in mockery of his vexation. Seizing it up he dashed it with indignation on the floor. "Unlucky was the day that I ever set eyes on thee,"

he cried, "or sheltered thy master beneath my roof!"

As the box struck the floor the lid flew wide open, and the parchment scroll rolled forth. Peregil sat regarding the scroll for some time in moody silence. At length rallying his ideas, "Who knows," thought he, "but this writing may be of some importance, as the Moor seems to have guarded it with such care!" Picking it up, therefore, he put it in his bosom, and the next morning, as he was crying water through the streets, he stopped at the shop of a Moor, a native of Tangier, who sold trinkets and perfumery, in the Zacatin, and asked him to explain the contents.

The Moor read the scroll attentively, then stroked his beard and smiled. "This manuscript," said he, "is a form of incantation for the recovery of hidden treasure that is under the power of enchantment. It is said to have such virtue that the strongest bolts and bars, nay the adamantine rock itself will yield before it."

"Bah!" cried the little Gallego, "what is all that to me? I am no enchanter, and know nothing of buried treasure." So saying he shouldered his water-jar, left the scroll in the hands of the Moor, and trudged forward on his daily rounds.

That evening, however, as he rested himself about twilight at the well of the Alhambra he found a number of gossips assembled at the place, and their conversation, as is not unusual at that shadowy hour, turned upon old tales and traditions of a supernatural nature. Being all poor as rats, they dwelt with peculiar fondness upon the popular theme of enchanted riches left by the Moors in various parts of the Alhambra. Above all, they concurred in the belief that there were great treasures buried deep in the earth under the tower of the Seven Floors.

These stories made an unusual impression on the mind of honest Peregil, and they sank deeper and deeper into his thoughts as he returned alone down the darkling avenues. "If, after all, there should be treasure hid beneath that tower—and if the scroll I left with the Moor should enable me to get at it!" In the sudden ecstasy of the thought he had well nigh let fall his water-jar.

That night he tumbled and tossed, and could scarcely get a wink of sleep for the thoughts that were bewildering his brain. In the morning, bright and early, he repaired to the shop of the Moor, and told him all that was passing in his mind. "You can read Arabic," said he; "suppose we go together to the tower and try the effect of the charm. If it fails we are no worse off than before, but if it succeeds we will share equally all the treasure we may discover."

"Hold," replied the Moslem; "this writing is not sufficient of itself; it must be read at midnight, by the light of a taper singularly compounded and prepared, the ingredients of which are not within my reach. Without such taper the scroll is of no avail."

"Say no more!" cried the little Gallego. "I have such a taper at hand and will bring it here in a moment." So saying he hastened home, and soon returned with the end of a yellow wax taper that he had found in the box of sandalwood.

The Moor felt it, and smelt of it. "Here are rare and costly perfumes," said he, "combined with this yellow wax. This is the kind of taper specified in the scroll. While this burns, the strongest walls and most secret caverns will remain open; wo to him, however, who lingers within until it be extinguished. He will remain enchanted with the treasure."

It was now agreed between them to try the charm that very night. At a late hour, therefore, when nothing

was stirring but bats and owls, they ascended the woody hill of the Alhambra, and approached that awful tower, shrouded by trees and rendered formidable by so many traditionary tales.

By the light of a lantern, they groped their way through bushes, and over fallen stones, to the door of a vault beneath the tower. With fear and trembling they descended a flight of steps cut into the rock. It led to an empty chamber, damp and drear, from which another flight of steps led to a deeper vault. In this way they descended four several flights, leading into as many vaults, one below the other, but the floor of the fourth was solid, and though, according to tradition, there remained three vaults still below, it was said to be impossible to penetrate farther, the residue being shut up by strong enchantment. The air of this vault was damp and chilly, and had an earthy smell, and the light scarce cast forth any rays. They paused here for a time in breathless suspense, until they faintly heard the clock of the watch tower strike midnight; upon this they lit the waxen taper, which diffused an odor of myrrh, and frankincense, and storax.

The Moor began to read in a hurried voice. He had scarce finished, when there was a noise as of subterraneous thunder. The earth shook, and the floor yawning open disclosed a flight of steps. Trembling with awe they descended, and by the light of the lantern found themselves in another vault, covered with Arabic inscriptions. In the center stood a great chest, secured with seven bands of steel, at each end of which sat an enchanted Moor in armor, but motionless as a statue, being controlled by the power of incantation. Before the chest were several jars filled with gold and silver and precious stones. In the largest of these they thrust their arms up to the elbow, and at every dip hauled forth hands-full of broad yellow pieces of Moorish gold, or bracelets and ornaments of the same precious metal, while occasionally a necklace of Oriental pearl would stick to their fingers. Still they trembled and breathed short while cramming their pockets with the spoils; and cast many a fearful glance at the two enchanted Moors, who sat grim and motionless, glaring upon them with unwinking eyes. At length, struck with a sudden panic at some fancied noise, they both rushed up the staircase, tumbled over one another into the upper apartment, overturned and extinguished the waxen taper, and the pavement again closed with a thundering sound.

Filled with dismay, they did not pause until they had groped their way out of the tower, and beheld the stars shining through the trees. Then seating themselves upon the grass, they divided the spoil, determining to content themselves for the present with this mere skimming of the jars, but to return on some future night and drain them to the bottom. To make sure of each other's good faith, also, they divided the talismans between them, one retaining the scroll and the other the taper; this done, they set off with light hearts and well-lined pockets for Granada.

As they wended their way down the hill, the shrewd Moor whispered a word of counsel in the ear of the simple little water-carrier.

"Friend Peregil," said he, "all this affair must be kept a profound secret until we have secured the treasure and conveyed it out of harm's way. If a whisper of it gets to the ear of the alcalde we are undone!"

"Certainly!" replied the Gallego; "nothing can be more true."

"Friend Peregil," said the Moor, "you are a discreet man, and I make no doubt you can keep a secret; but —you have a wife——"

"She shall not know a word of it!" replied the little water-carrier sturdily.

"Enough," said the Moor. "I depend upon thy discretion and thy promise."

Never was promise more positive and sincere; but alas! what man can keep a secret from his wife? Certainly not such a one as Peregil the water-carrier, who was one of the most loving and tractable of husbands. On his return home he found his wife moping in a corner.

"Mighty well!" cried she, as he entered; "you've come at last; after rambling about until this hour of the night. I wonder you have not brought home another Moor as a housemate." Then bursting into tears she began to wring her hands and smite her breast. "Unhappy woman that I am!" exclaimed she, "what will become of me! My house stripped and plundered by lawyers and alguazils; my husband a do-no-good that no longer brings home bread for his family, but goes rambling about, day and night, with infidel Moors. Oh, my children! my children! what will become of us; we shall all have to beg in the streets!"

Honest Peregil was so moved by the distress of his spouse that he could not help whimpering also. His heart was as full as his pocket, and not to be restrained. Thrusting his hand into the latter he hauled forth three or four broad gold pieces and slipped them into her bosom. The poor woman stared with astonishment, and could not understand the meaning of this golden shower. Before she could recover from her surprize, the little Gallego drew forth a chain of gold and dangled it before her, capering with exultation, his mouth distended from ear to ear.

"Holy Virgin protect us!" exclaimed the wife. "What hast thou been doing, Peregil? Surely thou hast not been committing murder and robbery!"

The idea scarce entered the brain of the poor woman than it became a certainty with her. She saw a prison and a gallows in the distance, and a little bandy-legged Gallego dangling pendant from it; and, overcome by the horrors conjured up by her imagination, fell into violent hysterics.

What could the poor man do? He had no other means of pacifying his wife and dispelling the phantoms of her fancy than by relating the whole story of his good fortune. This, however, he did not do until he had exacted from her the most solemn promise to keep it a profound secret from every living being.

To describe her joy would be impossible. She flung her arms round the neck of her husband, and almost strangled him with her caresses. "Now, wife!" exclaimed the little man with honest exultation, "what say you now to the Moor's legacy? Henceforth never abuse me for helping a fellow creature in distress."

The honest Gallego retired to his sheepskin mat, and slept as soundly as if on a bed of down. Not so his wife. She emptied the contents of his pockets upon the mat, and sat all night counting gold pieces of Arabic coin, trying on necklaces and ear-rings, and fancying the figure she should one day make when permitted to enjoy her riches.

On the following morning the honest Gallego took a broad golden coin, and repaired with it to a jeweler's shop in the Zacatin to offer it for sale; pretending to have found it among the ruins of the Alhambra. The jeweler saw that it had an Arabic inscription and was of the purest gold; he offered, however, but a third of its value, with which the water-carrier was perfectly content. Peregil now bought new clothes for his little flock, and all kinds of toys, together

with ample provisions for a hearty meal, and returning to his dwelling set all his children dancing around him, while he capered in the midst, the happiest of fathers.

The wife of the water-carrier kept her promise of secrecy with surprizing strictness. For a whole day and a half she went about with a look of mystery and a heart swelling almost to bursting, yet she held her peace, though surrounded by her gossips. It is true she could not help giving herself a few airs, apologized for her ragged dress, and talked of ordering a new basquina all trimmed with gold lace and bugles, and a new lace mantilla. She threw out hints of her husband's intention of leaving off his trade of water-carrying, as it did not altogether agree with his health. In fact, she thought they should all retire to the country for the summer, that the children might have the benefit of the mountain air, for there was no living in the city in this sultry season.

The neighbors stared at each other, and thought the poor woman had lost her wits, and her airs and graces and elegant pretensions were the theme of universal scoffing and merriment among her friends the moment her back was turned.

If she restrained herself abroad, however, she indemnified herself at home, and, putting a string of rich Oriental pearls round her neck, Moorish bracelets on her arms, an aigrette of diamonds on her head, sailed backward and forward in her slattern rags about the room, now and then stopping to admire herself in a piece of broken mirror. Nay, in the impulse of her simple vanity, she could not resist on one occasion showing herself at the window, to enjoy the effect of her finery on the passers-by.

As the fates would have it, Pedrillo Pedrugo, the meddlesome barber, was at this moment sitting idly in his shop on the opposite side of the street, when his ever watchful eye caught the sparkle of a diamond. In an instant he was at his loop-hole, reconnoitering the slattern spouse of the water-carrier, decorated with the splendor of an Eastern bride. No sooner had he taken an accurate inventory of her ornaments than he posted off with all speed to the alcalde. In a little while the hungry alguazil was again on the scent, and before the day was over, the unfortunate Peregil was again dragged into the presence of the judge.

"How is this, villain!" cried the alcalde in a furious voice. "You told me that the infidel who died in your house left nothing behind but an empty coffer, and now I hear of your wife flaunting in her rags decked out with pearls and diamonds. Wretch that thou art! prepare to render up the spoils of thy miserable victim, and to swing on the gallows that is already tired of waiting for thee."

The terrified water-carrier fell on his knees, and made a full relation of the marvelous manner in which he had gained his wealth. The alcalde, the alguazil, and the inquisitive barber listened with greedy ears to this Arabian tale of enchanted treasure. The alguazil was despatched to bring the Moor who had assisted in the incantation. The Moslem entered half frightened out of his wits at finding himself in the hands of the harpies of the law. When he beheld the water-carrier standing with sheepish look and downcast countenance, he comprehended the whole matter. "Miserable animal," said he, as he passed near him, "did I not warn thee against babbling to thy wife?"

The story of the Moor coincided exactly with that of his colleague, but the alcalde affected to be slow of belief, and threw out menaces of imprisonment and rigorous investigation.

"Softly, good Señor Alcalde," said the Mussulman, who by this time had recovered his usual shrewdness and

self-possession. "Let us not mar fortune's favors in the scramble for them. Nobody knows anything of this matter but ourselves; let us keep the secret. There is wealth enough in the cave to enrich us all. Promise a fair division, and all shall be produced; refuse, and the cave shall remain forever closed."

The alcalde consulted apart with the alguazil. The latter was an old fox in his profession. "Promise anything," said he, "until you get possession of the treasure. You may then seize upon the whole, and if he and his accomplice dare to murmur, threaten them with the fagot and the stake as infidels and sorcerers."

The alcalde relished the advice. Smoothing his brow and turning to the Moor,—"This is a strange story," said he, "and may be true, but I must have ocular proof of it. This very night you must repeat the incantation in my presence. If there be really such treasure, we will share it amicably between us, and say nothing further of the matter; if ye have deceived me, expect no mercy at my hands. In the meantime you must remain in custody."

The Moor and the water-carrier cheerfully agreed to these conditions, satisfied that the event would prove the truth of their words.

TOWARD midnight the alcalde sallied forth secretly, attended by the alguazil and the meddlesome barber, all strongly armed. They conducted the Moor and the water-carrier as prisoners, and were provided with the stout donkey of the latter, to bear off the expected treasure. They arrived at the tower without being observed, and tying the donkey to a fig-tree, descended into the fourth vault of the tower.

The scroll was produced, the yellow waxen taper lighted, and the Moor read the form of incantation. The earth trembled as before, and the pavement opened with a thundering sound, disclosing the narrow flight of steps. The alcalde, the alguazil, and the barber were struck aghast, and could not summon courage to descend. The Moor and the water-carrier entered the lower vault and found the two Moors seated as before, silent and motionless. They removed two of the great jars, filled with golden coin and precious stones. The water-carrier bore them up one by one upon his shoulders, but though a strong-backed little man, and accustomed to carry burdens, he staggered beneath their weight, and found that, when slung on each side of his donkey, they were as much as the animal could bear.

"Let us be content for the present," said the Moor; "here is as much treasure as we can carry off without being perceived, and enough to make us all wealthy to our heart's desire."

"Is there more treasure remaining behind?" demanded the alcalde.

"The greatest prize of all," said the Moor; "a huge coffer, bound with bands of steel, and filled with pearls and precious stones."

"Let us have up the coffer by all means," cried the grasping alcalde.

"I will descend for no more," said the Moor, doggedly. "Enough is enough for a reasonable man; more is superfluous."

"And I," said the water-carrier, "will bring up no further burthen to break the back of my poor donkey."

Finding commands, threats, and entreaties equally vain, the alcalde turned to his two adherents. "Aid me," said he, "to bring up the coffer, and its contents shall be divided between us." So saying he descended the steps, followed, with trembling reluctance, by the alguazil and the barber.

No sooner did the Moor behold them fairly earthed than he extinguished the yellow taper: the pavement closed with its usual crash, and

the three worthies remained buried in its womb.

He then hastened up the different flights of steps, nor stopped until in the open air. The little water-carrier followed him as fast as his short legs would permit.

"What hast thou done?" cried Peregil, as soon as he could recover breath. "The alcalde and the other two are shut up in the vault!"

"It is the will of Allah!" said the Moor, devoutly.

"And will you not release them?" demanded the Gallego.

"Allah forbid!" replied the Moor, smoothing his beard. "It is written in the book of fate that they shall remain enchanted until some future adventurer shall come to break the charm. The will of God be done!" So saying he hurled the end of the waxen taper far among the gloomy thickets of the glen.

There was now no remedy; so the Moor and the water-carrier proceeded with the richly laden donkey toward the city; nor could honest Peregil refrain from hugging and kissing his long-eared fellow laborer, thus restored to him from the clutches of the law; and, in fact, it is doubtful which gave the simple-hearted little man most joy at the moment, the gaining of the treasure or the recovery of the donkey.

The two partners in good luck divided their spoil amicably and fairly, excepting that the Moor, who had a little taste for trinketry, made out to get into his heap the most of the pearls and precious stones, and other baubles, but then he always gave the water-carrier in lieu magnificent jewels of massy gold four times the size, with which the latter was heartily content. They took care not to linger within reach of accidents, but made off to enjoy their wealth undisturbed in other countries. The Moor returned into Africa, to his native city of Tetuan, and the Gallego, with his wife, his children and his donkey, made the best of his way to Portugal. Here, under the admonition and tuition of his wife, he became a personage of some consequence, for she made the little man array his long body and short legs in doublet and hose, with a feather in his hat and a sword by his side; and, laying aside the familiar appellation of Peregil, assume the more sonorous title of Don Pedro Gil. His progeny grew up a thriving and merry-hearted, though short and bandy-legged generation; while the Señora Gil, be-fringed, be-laced, and be-tasseled from her head to her heels, with glittering rings on every finger, became a model of slattern fashion and finery.

As to the alcalde and his adjuncts, they remained shut up under the great tower of the Seven Floors, and there they remain spellbound at the present day. Whenever there shall be a lack in Spain of pimping barbers, sharking alguazils, and corrupt alcaldes, they may be sought after; but if they have to wait until such time for their deliverance, there is danger of their enchantment enduring until doomsday.

THE January issue of WEIRD TALES has been called the best yet by many readers who have written enthusiastic letters to The Eyrie. We are glad to know that it found such favor with you, the readers, and we want to keep the magazine up to the same high standard. We have a wealth of wonderful stories planned for future issues, but we need your co-operation to keep WEIRD TALES the best magazine in its field. You can help us do this by writing to The Eyrie and letting us know what stories you like best; also, if there are any stories you *don't* like, we want to know which ones they are, and why you don't like them. It is by such co-operation from its readers that WEIRD TALES has built up to its present enviable standard, and we want to make it better and better, with the help of your counsel and advice as to the stories in it, and the kind of stories you want to see in it. So, whether you like WEIRD TALES or not, we appreciate hearing from you, the readers, and finding out what you think of us.

"I happened to see the January issue of WEIRD TALES on a news stand," writes R. S. Morand, of New York City, "and the cover certainly did look weird. In running over the contents I was struck by the peculiar title of *While the Lamps Hissed*. I am not acquainted with your authors yet, so I had to judge merely by the names of the stories as to the merit of the magazine, and that was the one that roused my curiosity. I found it and the others fully up to my expectations, and from now on I am going to be a constant reader of WEIRD TALES."

Miss Irene Packham, of Patchogue, N. Y., writes: "The stories recently published in WEIRD TALES I enjoyed so much that I read them twice. *The Infidel's Daughter* was a fine story and deserving of praise. A story that holds my interest absolutely when I read is the serial by Edmond Hamilton: *The Time-Raider*. *The Invading Horde*, by Arthur J. Burks, my favorite author, is finely written and ends in a rather strange manner, which is altogether in keeping with the rest of the story."

"I just finished *The Time-Raider*," writes Gene Boydston, of San Francisco, "and it was one of the most thrilling stories I've ever read (and I

read a lot). I hope Edmond Hamilton writes some more stories for WEIRD TALES. Kindly tell him that if I hadn't known *The Time-Raider* is a story of his great imagination I'd have believed it all truly had happened to somebody, the way he wrote it."

B. Bilitt of Lynchburg, Virginia, comes to the defense of Lieutenant Burks, whose story in the November issue was scorched by the fiery breath of an adverse critic writing in The Eyrie. "It is indeed a great pity that every story making a slight departure from the usual and commonplace must make itself such a tempting morsel for the harpies of literature and the cranks of detail," writes Mr. Bilitt. "I am referring to Lieutenant Burks' tale, *The Invading Horde,* and Mr. Allen's punctilious criticisms of its fearful shortcomings. His air of a magnanimous 'oh-I'll-tolerate-the-miserable-thing' and his very quaint and erudite comparisons of the story to 'amœbas' and 'First Century farmers' are disgustingly 'smart alec'. Personally, I consider all the agitation over the improbability of such a yarn as Lieutenant Burks' as much ado about nothing. The story afforded me a half-hour of genuine pleasure and I eagerly await any others of the same sort."

Writes Pauline Louise Banker, of Blackwell, Oklahoma: "Your January issue, which I have just finished reading, is one of the best you have put out. *The Giant World* by Ray Cummings promises us lots of excitement and I can hardly wait to get the next installment."

Referring to the publication in book form of *The Moon Terror,* which first appeared serially in WEIRD TALES, G. Theodore Arms of Pottstown, Pennsylvania, writes: "I am quite enthusiastic about your republishing old favorites from your files. This plan of issuing cloth-bound reprints is the best departure you have ever made. I trust that success will enable you to continue to reprint some of the good things that otherwise would be lost with the scattering of carefully hoarded but flimsy magazines. Would not your readers respond to a collection of Lovecraft's best, or a few of the old stories of Haiti, or *Invaders From the Dark,* or a selection of old interplanetary tales, or some of your old oddities like *Teoquitla the Golden, The Song Eternal, The Phantom Farmhouse, The Earth Girl, The Pelican,* or several of your always popular devil-worship stories? Now that you have secured Rankin as illustrator WEIRD TALES can not go wrong so long as you keep up the present pleasant variety in the character of the stories in each issue."

L. Lindsay, of San Francisco, writes to The Eyrie: "*The Red Brain* by Donald Wandrei, published in the October issue, is a classic; one that must not be allowed to pass by without special mention. For sheer weirdness, vastness of scope and magnitude of conception, coupled with its lucidity of language and beauty of expression, it is unsurpassable. The narrative is forceful and impressive at the same time, being delightfully free from and un-

marred by an excess of boresome conversational detail. The writer, in his special style and sphere, is as fanciful and fantastic as Lovecraft in his field."

H. P. Lovecraft, author of *The Call of Cthulhu* and other superb stories, writes to say how much he was impressed by Everil Worrell's story, *The Canal*, in the December issue. "That was what I call a *genuine weird tale*, with all the subtle atmospheric conditions adequately realized," he writes. "Why in Heaven's name can't the bulk of the writers catch at least some faint echo of the black, brooding whispers from unholy abysses and blasphemous dimensions which give a narrative like this its imponderable element of competence and mastery? Next best thing in the issue was Burks' *Bells of Oceana*. That had the genuine thrill of Outsideness, too."

WEIRD TALES will shortly publish another story by Lovecraft, called *The Lurking Fear*, which has all the elements of weirdness that the most exacting lover of shuddery stories could desire.

Here is a complaint from Ivan W. Gilbert of Indianapolis: "I have noticed in several stories that the author leads us through hair-raising, nerve-shattering search for some awful 'what's it' and then, after finding 'it', describes it by saying that 'no words are in existence that can adequately describe the "it".' This takes all the punch out of the story for me. My imagination is not equal to seeing something that 'words can not describe'."

Readers, your favorite story in the January issue, as shown by your votes, was *The Gods of East and West*, by Seabury Quinn. Second place goes to the concluding part of Edmond Hamilton's serial, *The Time-Raider*. What is your favorite story in this issue?

MY FAVORITE STORIES IN THE MARCH WEIRD TALES ARE:

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The Strange People

(Continued from page 310)

pair. "We do not understand anything! Maria says you are our friend. We need a friend. Else we die. And if you do not help us——"

Cunningham stared from one to the other, but it was hard to think of anything when he looked at Maria. He had taken the Strangers seriously enough when he knew of the first man's being killed. Now it looked as if he was called upon to prevent deadly serious trouble in the hills.

"I'll try," he said hopelessly. "Yes, I'll try. Maria——"

The color mounted in her cheeks. Then she seemed to summon all her pride and met his eyes fairly. They told him many things, her eyes.

"I—I will wait for you," she told him. And in the words she said much more than the words themselves.

Cunningham was tingling all over, at the same time that he felt a curious sense of absurdity in escorting callers to the window instead of to the door. But before they reached it a head appeared there. It was that of the young Stranger who had been the first to appear from the woods that afternoon.

"The sheriff," he whispered. "He came. We hit him on the head. Shall we kill him?"

"No!" said Cunningham sharply. "Tie him up until you get clear away. Did he see you coming up to my window?"

"No." The young man shrugged and disappeared. There were whispered instructions below. To Cunningham it seemed that the whispers were in a strange tongue. Maria and her father slipped out. Then there were little rustlings below. The ladder, probably, being taken down and carried elsewhere, and the marks it had made in the earth erased.

Cunningham sank into a chair and stared before him. His blood was still pounding in his veins. And Maria had glanced back at him as she disappeared from view. But there was no denying that a tremendous and unwelcome responsibility had been thrust upon him.

They were foreigners. They must be. They did not understand the laws of the United States—and they were hated now and would soon be subject to persecution. Why, otherwise, did Vladimir bribe the sheriff and try to keep both Gray and Cunningham away from the Strange People? Why, otherwise, had such unreasoning hatred been expressed that morning in Bendale?

And it was up to Cunningham to prevent a wholesale tragedy. For some unknown reason they believed that he was their friend. They would not kill anyone until he had spoken to them. That was the promise Stephan had made in their behalf,—and yet they were not bloodthirsty. He had said they only wished to be let alone, and he could not understand that that was the surest way to be thoroughly investigated. They depended now upon Cunningham. Before, without a counselor, they had killed. Now, unless Cunningham aided them, they would kill again. And Cunningham felt that the responsibility of human lives was more than he had bargained for.

Adventure was all very well, and romance was all very well, but this was different and in deadly earnest. And Cunningham could not feel any sense of superiority to them, as most men feel toward most uninformed foreigners. They were unlike him, but they were certainly not inferior to him. They knew less, but they gave

(Continued on page 430)

Superb Stories

NOWHERE except in the pages of WEIRD TALES can you find such superb stories of the bizarre, the grotesque and the terrible—fascinating tales that grip the imagination and send shivers of apprehension up the spine—tales that take one from the humdrum, matter-of-fact world into a deathless realm of fancy—tales so thrillingly told that they seem very real. This magazine prints the best contemporary weird fiction in the world. If Poe were alive he would undoubtedly be a contributor to WEIRD TALES. In addition to creepy mystery stories, ghost-tales, stories of devil-worship, witchcraft, vampires and strange monsters, this magazine also prints the cream of the weird-scientific fiction that is written today—tales of the spaces between the worlds, surgical stories, and stories that look into the future with the eye of prophecy. Among the amazing tales in the next few issues will be:

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A startling weird-scientific serial—a fascinating tale of an involuntary voyage into the very bowels of the earth, and strange and thrilling adventures amid the wild, weird beauty of that dreamland that lies within the earth.

THE SPACE-EATERS, *by Frank Belknap Long, Jr.*
One of the eeriest and most shuddery of all weird stories—a tale of a tremendous menace that closes in upon the earth from outside our solar system—a powerful story of strange horror and uncanny terror, that will make your flesh creep as you read it.

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This young author, whose novel, "The Rampant Age," is a sensation in the literary world, returns to the weird tale in a story of creeping horror that leaps out in a thrilling denouement.

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Details on first inside cover of this issue

(Continued from page 428)

no indication of lesser intelligence. And Maria——

Cunningham stood up, a trifle pale.

"Well," he muttered, "I asked for adventure and I guess I've got it."

There was another knock on the door.

"What is it?" he demanded. He wanted to be alone to think.

"Gray," said a dry voice. "Have you gotten out of bed, Cunningham?"

Cunningham opened the door.

"I came in," said Gray dryly, "to mention that Vladimir went through my room while I was gone. One key will unlock any door in this sort of hotel."

"He went through mine, too," said Cunningham abstractedly.

"And also," said Gray still more dryly, "to mention that the partitions here are very thin and that I heard all of the conversation just now."

Cunningham looked up with a start.

"I knocked on your door," Gray added, smiling cryptically, "because I knew you wouldn't open it. I was doing what I could to cement their confidence in you. Are you going to help them?"

"I guess I've got to try," said Cunningham grimly. "But I wish I knew what to do."

"Keep them from killing," Gray told him with sudden sharpness. "And also, keep them out of jail. You've got to do it, Cunningham! There'll be hell to pay in those hills if you don't. These people are scared. That's why they killed that man we saw on the train. And they will be worse scared of Vladimir. He hasn't gone, and if I can read faces he's planning devilment for them. I tell you there'll be wholesale killings in the hills unless you go up there! Stay with them. Argue with them. Educate them if you must. But keep them from killing anybody!"

"And who," asked Cunningham grimly, "is going to keep Vladimir from starting something?"

Gray spread out his hands. Then he said curtly, "Look here. I tell you nothing——"

"Just like most other people," interpolated Cunningham none too cordially.

"——nothing," went on Gray, ignoring the interruption, "but I can promise that you won't get into trouble through trying to keep the peace."

"You're a detective?"

"No," snapped Gray. "I'm not. But I can promise that much."

"All those who have made mysteries of themselves so far," observed Cunningham grimly, "have offered me money. What do you offer?"

Gray stopped short. He seemed to realize for the first time just what sort of a predicament Cunningham was in, hopelessly at sea regarding the motives of every person in the extraordinary triangle.

"Advice," he said soberly after an instant. "I'll offer you advice. That girl is devilish pretty and I heard what you said to her. And it's insanity to say it, but—either avoid her entirely or marry her at once. And I mean at once! I've a reason for warning you."

And just as he put his hand on the knob of the door there was a scream on the ground outside. Maria had screamed. There was a crashing of glass, and as Cunningham hurled himself to his feet a shot followed, which was sickeningly loud and reverberated horribly in the stillness.

Then Vladimir's voice came purringly from a spot near by, as if he were gloating to himself, "Ha! I got her!"

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Flames of Destiny

(Continued from page 335)

whole forming a dreadful story of ignorant superstition and cowardly revenge. When I had read the last word I looked across at my visitor.

"I knew that she was innocent—indeed, what sane person would believe otherwise?" I said. Then I rose to my feet, unlocked a drawer of the bureau and took out the broken cross. "By the way, I have a relic here which, I think, belonged to that poor, misjudged girl."

Wonderingly she took it from me. Then, raising her hand to the slender chain around her neck (how well I remembered that gesture!), she brought forth another broken cross, and placed them together.

The two halves fitted exactly.

* * * * * * *

LOOKING back over the events which I have here set down, I must confess that there are several points which are by no means clear. Can it be possible that, after all, my experience was nothing but a particularly vivid dream? Did Adrian Dane, suspecting his imminent death, himself induce the vision of the past by means of his hypnotic suggestion, in order to bring about a meeting between his sister and myself? But whether it was due to dream, trance, or merely my automatic mental reaction to the atmosphere of that old-world inn, I have never regretted the day it happened. For it was the direct cause of my meeting with the lady who is now my wife.

During our brief courtship we often discussed the tragic story of Althea Dane; but it was not until after our wedding that I told her how, clasped in each other's arms, our twin-souls had passed through the flames of destiny to the paradise of love and happiness which now is ours.

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